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**Rare texts  
by the  
Situationist  
International,  
1966 to 1972**

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# The Ideology of Dialogue

Unattributed; translator unknown

*Internationale Situationniste* #10, May 1966

1. The practical rupture of the situationists with the approvers of any fragment of the present order (particularly visible with respect to those *responsible* for culture and the politics of submission) -- and its limit case: the exclusion of some members of the SI -- though being the most natural attitude that derives immediately from our fundamental positions, is also the worst understood; it is with regard to this that certain commentators have spread the most hostile interpretations [of the SI], to the extent of worrying half-informed people. The reality is, in this precise sense, very simple. Those who accept one or more variants of the existing false dialogue make themselves the defenders of a new kind of *free exchange*, in the name of an abstract right of dialogue no matter what the price (price to be paid in concessions made to the lie), and reproach us for interrupting the *false dialogue*. It is nevertheless in this, and nothing else, that we can be carriers of the reality of dialogue. By working through the problem of exclusion, we believe we have advanced, through experimentation, the desirable model of a nonhierarchical organization of a *common project*, which can only be sustained by the self-discipline of individuals, proving itself in the coherence of the theories and acts by which each can engage all the others. The unilaterality of Stirner's conceptions about the relations of the egoist and the organization that he takes and leaves according to his caprice (even if it is a carrier of a kernel of truth about *that aspect* of freedom) does not allow its phantom of passive and disarmed "organization" any independent base. It is an organization to attract momentarily *one* "egoist" *only* whose personal game will justly despise the coarse sociocentrism of that organization (and, in fact, the Stirnerian individual can very well enter the most reactionary association for his personal profit). But all free association -- "a bond, not a power" -- where individuals recognize each other on a common base, cannot be the passive object of one caprice. Those who do not want to play or command must *reject* anyone whose conduct requires their engagement. When the SI excludes someone, we do not demand of that individual an account of his [sic] life, but *of ours*, of the common project that he would like to falsify (for enemy goals, or by lack of discernment). Each remains free, in our eyes, for himself -- that this freedom is generally poor is another problem, without which there would not actually be any need for undertakings like the SI -- and, in giving back his own freedom to an individual who has always remained autonomous, we mean only that that autonomy has not been able to exert itself in our common project. In rejecting someone, according to the rules of the game that he was believed to have accepted, or feigned accepting, it is *our own resignation* that we reject.

2. We think it useful to make matters clear by extracts of two letters addressed recently to one of our correspondents in Eastern Europe.

3. (First letter.) Some of our theoretical positions (for example, about play, language, etc.) would not only risk becoming false and without value, but also *would already* be without value today if we held them in coexistence with dogmatism of a doctrine, whatever it may be. We think just as you do that "The freedom to go by all the unaccustomed paths" must be absolute (and not only on the artistic or theoretical plane, but in all aspects of practical life). For a thousand reasons of which the experience of the East is the most evident, we know that ideology in power makes all partial truths pass into absolute lie. . . . We are not a *power* in society, and thus our "exclusions" only mean our freedom to distinguish ourselves from the confusionism around us or even among us, which is much closer to that of existing social power and has the advantages of it. We have never wanted to prevent anyone from expressing his ideas or doing what he wants (and we never sought to be in a practical position to exert pressure in that sense.) We refuse only *to be mixed there ourselves*, against our convictions and our tastes. Note that this is all the more vital as we have almost no freedom to express our own convictions and tastes such as they really are, which, because of their character, is clearly against the current. Our "intolerance" is always a response -- very limited -- to the intolerance and the exclusion, practically solidified, that *we meet everywhere*, particularly among "the established intelligentsia" (considerably stronger than the ones Surrealism had to suffer) and which hardly surprises us. Just as we are not to any degree a power of



control in society; we *refuse to become one* someday in favor of some political modification (we are in this matter partisans of *radical self-management*, of the workers' councils abolishing all state or even separate "theoretical" power); and we refuse to transform ourselves into any power, in the small scale that would be permitted to us now, as we do not accept enrolling *disciples* who would give us, at the same time as that right of control and direction *over them*, a greater recognized social value, but only as vulgar artistic or political ideology. . . . One cannot confuse the practical conditions of free thought here and in the East -- or, for example, in Spain. There, where nothing can be openly expressed, it is necessary to support the right of all to express themselves. But in conditions where everybody -- although through wanting, of course, to suppress this practical freedom -- must first reassert its right to existence (an "unaccustomed" path among those possible), without it being "recuperated" and distorted by the *order* which manifestly reigns above this apparent overt confusion and complexity, and finally even possesses the *monopoly of appearance* (cf. our critique of the "spectacle" in the society of consumption of abundant commodities). Finally, the reigning "tolerance" is a unique sense, and this on a planetary scale in spite of exploitation. What is tolerated, fundamentally, by the tolerant people who have the say-so, is the *established power* everywhere. You tell us that you live in [...] You would see in Paris how much these tolerant Leftist intellectuals [of whom you speak] are finally uncertain, understanding and also tolerant of the conditions established in [...] or Peking. They call "the sense of history" their Hegelian adhesion to *what they read in the newspapers* daily.

4. (Second letter) A radically different base of departure in fact restores first *the truth* of the libertarian attempts of the past. It is necessary to break cleanly with the old confusion; and then also with its open, or sly, or simply unconscious partisans. Evidently, it is necessary for us to bear the negative weight of the attitude that we have chosen. We have to acknowledge the negative. We are solidly in accord with you about the problem of the unity of the actual avant-garde. In fact, we open the dialogue wherever the spirit of the negative manifests itself in a radical sense, because that spirit is in itself divided by a struggle between, on the one hand, its truth, and on the other, its *recuperation* organized by power.



# Decor and the Spectators of Suicide

## Unattributed

### *Internationale Situationniste #10, 1966*

Suicide has now practically reached epidemic proportions in the United States. In 1965, it took tenth place among the causes of death in the country, and *third place* among those of young people. Setting up "anti-suicide centers," one of them operating on a nationwide level, is now being seriously considered.

Recently, in France, a certain Bernard Durin killed himself -- apparently for no reason. He was 37 years old and had been a model employee for the last fifteen of them. Everyone who knew him agreed that "he had everything one needs to be happy." He had "a ten-year-old daughter, Agnes, who got on well at school. A charming wife. A good job at IBM. A salary of 2,500 francs a month. An attractively furnished modern apartment. A 404 [automobile]. A television, a washing machine, a refrigerator and even an aquarium. . . .

In an article in *France-Soir*, 24 December 1964, Charles Coron wrote:

The shop where Durin worked was situated in a multi-story glass-fronted building. His section largely consisted of small metal offices. Shelves stretched out of sight. Metal shelves. Metal filing cabinets. It was there that the spare parts Durin sorted out and packaged up were kept. No windows. Neon light. His timetable was irregular. The shop was open from seven in the morning until twelve at night. His shift was changed every two weeks. Sometimes he got up at five-thirty in the morning and finished work at four in the afternoon. Sometimes he started work at four-thirty in the afternoon and got home at one o'clock in the morning. Durin was a model employee. No one worked harder. Someone suggested he take a correspondence course in English. He did so. He studied in the evening. He studied on Saturday and Sunday. . . . When he left the shop in Vincennes, Durin drove back to his home in Bondy in his 404. He drove in the lines of traffic you all know. He waited in the traffic jams. He saw the lights of the Bondy skyscraper housing estate. The straight lines. The concrete. The shopping center in the middle. He lived in apartment number 1153, 13, rue Leon Blum, FG 3. That was his life: electronics, skyscraper housing estates, cars, refrigerators and televisions. It was also his death.

For several years now, at least in the United States, it hasn't been uncommon to see excited crowds watching someone who has been driven desperate threaten to hurl themselves down from a window ledge or a roof. Whether the public has become *blase*, or whether it is attracted by more professional spectacles, it doesn't intend to pay any further attention to these "unofficial stars" unless they get on with it, and jump. So far as we know, it was on 16 April 1964, in Albany, New York State, that for the first time this new attitude came out into the open. While Richard Reinemann, aged 19, prevaricated for the better part of two hours on a twelfth-story ledge, a crowd of some four thousand people watching him chanted "Jump!" A female passersby explained: "I don't want to wait all night. I've already missed my favorite TV show."



# The Newest School Buildings Are Indistinguishable from the Newest Prisons or the Newest Industrial Complexes

## The Council for the Liberation of Daily Life

22 September 1968

Beyond the family structure imposed on us, the school is generally the first instrument of social repression a child meets in life. To the school is assigned the task of breaking the will to individuation, of "channeling the mind," of incapacitating the child with the rules that hold this society together: "This is the way things will be because this is the way they are." The classroom serves to impress through the medium of daily routine that life is essentially following orders, that the choices are always among the given, that control of your life is, and always will be, somewhere else. Passivity is the rule, and all "activity" is planned (except for the frills: the extracurricular, and then some). It is not accidental that the newest school buildings are indistinguishable from the newest prisons or the newest industrial complexes.

All the talk around the New York City "school crisis" misses this altogether. And this, too, is not accidental.

Beyond a few speeches aimed at capturing a constituency, it has not been a question of standard of teaching, which is bad, or of type of school, which initiates into this "life." "Control" has been the central issue. All the protagonists would like to see the schools operating. It is a minor question as to who will administer (control) district classrooms, which, with or without racism, function to introduce human beings into a world, a "life," that moves further beyond anyone's control every day. Yet the mere raising of the question of control is dangerous. It is always possible that once people get an inkling that they can handle part of their lives, they might feel they can handle the whole thing; that people might realize that power is them, as individuals.

We said just now that it is a minor question as to who will administer district schools. It is of course not minor for the central Board of Education (the City), which is delegating power to lower Local Boards so that there may be better central control over the educational system. (It is hoped that this will help, by making people feel it is *their* school, bring about higher standards in the teaching of a system that we maintain is to be rejected in its entirety.) The term "decentralization" has been captured in order to represent this attempt to reinforce central control. The term loses all of its implications of autonomous power, *absence* of central authority.

What [Albert] Shanker wants -- with his all-city union of teachers -- is a necessity within the centralized hierarchy: the assurance that the union will be able to deal with the central Board for a Master Contract covering the city, that this will be unquestioned by the Local Boards (who will then be able to present their gripes in subsidiary negotiations).

It is little wonder that so many should consider such "decentralization" inevitable.

It is significant that the one voice that has not been heard in the great debate is that of the students. But, after all, they cannot be expected to understand, because they are only children, partially educated beings, partially *molded* to the system. And workers are dumb. And prisoners are unreformed criminals. Or so say the fictions that surround life. In the minds of the Mayor, of the [members of the] Teachers Union, of the State Commissioner, of those who would use the issue of "community control" for their own ends -- in the minds of all those who seek to maintain *this* education as an entrance into *this* system, there is the fear that if and when the student voice is heard it will say dangerous things. Dangerous, that is, to those people and the system they maintain.



Throughout much of the city, there has been the picture of locked schools with the principals on the inside, police on the outside. There is a realization on the part of the Mayor, the Board of Education and the Union that there are far too many people whose "debt to education" might tempt them to convert open, empty schools into most unusual playgrounds. And there is *definitely* no place in the curriculum for social creativity, that is, the spontaneous activity of free individuals.

In the interaction of the various protagonists and the students, some are likely to come forward who may sense the meaning of real decentralization, who would then be impelled to want to change the system of education, to throw out this one, establish another. But who, attempting really to throw out this one, will not have to pass through throwing out the city, the state, the federal structures [as well]? Danger to the way things are lurks everywhere.

The system -- as it is so often called in reference to the overall prevailing organization of life -- is caught in an irreversible decay. But a system that decays does not necessarily pass. All of its solutions are attempts to arrest decay, freeze relations, make the system *permanent*: "decentralizing" schools is one such solution, building suburbs is another. The fascination with the synthetic -- from transistorized hearts to glass-bubble cities -- is no accident. The synthetic is so much more easily manipulated, controlled, and always, for a better living, as we all know, through chemistry.

As long as the struggle is to maintain variations on what is, the solution to *changing* life is obscured, and obstructed.

"Well," someone will evitably say, "from your analysis, we might conclude that people should do nothing about what they see as wrong or feel oppressing them, until they are prepared to attack and change 'the whole system.' "

This is not our meaning.

Those who feel it is meaningful (not those desiring to use an "issue," the politicians, manipulators, those who build constituencies), those who feel it is *meaningful* to fight over this or that *must* do so. What we say is the *assault required to change one part is an assault from all sides, on the whole*. People activate themselves, engage in protest, because of how it makes them feel. And we will all feel best when the control over all facets, all aspects of our lives resides in us alone.





# Post Mortem Ante Facto

By Anonymous Proletarian [Bruce Elwell]

Comrades, the text [below] is issued (January 10, 1969) as a supplement to the first issue of SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL, the imminent publication which it announces.

THE ONLY GOOD POLITICIAN IS A DEAD POLITICIAN says the wonderful old adage, but it has been drained of its real content and turned against itself when the Kennedys continue to campaign from the grave. (We have seen earrings that at one angle show an image of Christ and, at another, an image of Bobby Kennedy: under the political economy, a shot in the head is worth two in the hands.) Having no future, the world as it is now organized must peel backward in time seeking an image that meets the needs of a greater medium and the greater message. From the moment the image of the Emperor suits them well. The Emperor: a distant creature, reputedly of the flesh although descended from the gods, who reigns over the people while the actual administration of the Empire is "decentralized." Feudalism returns with corporations and commodities and computers and committees -- all by the thousands --- competing to be the local princes in the hierarchies of the mind.

Since it is no longer safe to physically seek the audience for the show, the President-as-Emperor surrenders to the dictatorship of other specialists and gives audience in everyone's home through the wonders of television. Nixon announcing his cabinet in a "TV spectacular" (his words: we agree). The show must go on -- on to the inauguration of another chief bureaucrat. A cheap pageant, this time for double your money. (They have doubled his salary.) And, yes, Nixon's the One. Which makes [him] Richard the First. In many (little) ways. The first US President to be *programmed*. Formerly, candidates and officials were *briefed* by their advisors. Briefing is a military term -- it does not convey the proper image; this is the age of the computer, the cybernetic system, the New Nixon. And Richard the first president to say "Sock it to me" on television [on the show "Laugh In"]. Could that be a challenge? Hardly. Only more of the show.

The adjustments facing the image called the Nixon Administration are interesting, but the workings of the process which summons that apparition into existence also deserve comment.

The NAACP advertized on the radio (in its best boss militant voice), saying that voting is beautiful, man, be beautiful, bop on down there and pull that lever. And Lee, Your Leader, a New York City disc jockey, calls for "his people" to "get involved," [to] "parti-ci-pate" in voting for a record (you have three choices) the station will play. All during Election Day, the TV and radio told us that it looked like a record voter turnout. It was days before the papers admitted that it had been, on the contrary, a rather small showing. It had all been a cheap "follow the herd" advertizing gimmick, and it hadn't worked. All this must be assumed when the show goes on.

Meanwhile, a miniature farce was going on in the "Leftwing." All those anemic little companies sang the praises of their appointed saviors, *competing* for votes, waiting for the returns. And, even in blackface, the showing was miserable. Those creeps might do well to join their brothers in power in a campaign for compulsory election "participation" as practiced in (other) nations. Perhaps private industry is in the lead, as Nixon and [Marshall] McLuhan are fond of saying, and telephone polling methods might prove more satisfactory. And maybe giving a prize with every vote for a given candidate with a bonus if he wins. They could call it "participation incentives" to get around any archaic laws on the subject.

The most thoroughgoing deceit becomes unwitting honesty. The biggest show reveals the reality it tries to conceal.

The function of the electoral process becomes clearer the more the heroes and villains and clowns dance around it. Electoral politics is a ritual screwing. The winning candidate is the man who (for four years) will *sacrifice* himself in the name of the people. He will crusade for them, worry for them, perhaps die



for them (only to achieve eternal life) and ultimately be betrayed by them as they cast him out of office. [Lyndon] Johnson's fate with be Nixon's, barring the slug. The democracy of the myth penetrates the myth of democracy, and the show goes on. To the *real* sacrifice of just about everyone corresponds the *mythical* sacrifice of the chosen leader. Through myth, he assumes all our sins including the great sin of ultimately rejecting him for another. When the feudal returns, you know that the corpse of the religious is being propped up close by. The spectacle has yet to project the smell of all the rotting old forms into our living rooms, but in moments of reflection it chokes us just the same.

George Wallace, mouthy little toad that he is, was alone among the major candidates (after Bobby's exit) to grasp the myth that could postpone everything coming unglued. In his leaflet addressed to workers, [Wallace] says that they (the particular bureaucrats he opposes) are looking down their noses at the worker and [are] "saying to him, 'Since you do not know how to get up in the morning or go to bed at night, we are going to write some guidelines,' and I say to you that people in all walks of life in these United States are tired of a bunch of pseudo-intellectuals writing guidelines telling them what to do. I don't think they need anybody telling them what to do." [Wallace] would appropriate, with his little flatteries, the only power that can oppose and destroy the commodity show he would maintain.

The spectacle is so woven that every fragment, every partial thought or deed, eventually comes to dance in *its* chorus line and the maintenance of *its* survival. Kennedy and [Lee Harvey] Oswald dance side-by-side; each in his own way is a star. Two little known historical incidents point to a suppression of the politician who stands outside the spectacle and in mortal opposition to it:

(1) General Santa Anna took the Mexican Presidency and fled from it many times. As one regime prior to the war with the US collapsed around him, he, as usual, headed for exile. "He was caught by some barbaric Indians who thought it would be a huge joke to boil him, wrap his remains in banana leaves, and present them to the nation as a great tamale" (*Latin America*, J.E. Fagg). The ultimate *practical* joke. Unfortunately, these inspired men were dissuaded (by the new regime).

(2) During 1951, American, French and British papers reported that "suspicion [is] mounting in the lobbies of the French Senate that M. Victor Bioka Boda, member for the Ivory Coast had been eaten by his constituents." He had been missing for over a year, his two wives were said to have filed a complaint, and the bones had been found. Such poetry the national bureaucrats of "emerging Africa" are not about to appreciate.

All this is not to point to a gastronomical solution to electoral politics, although it is tempting. One thought of the chemically-fed, electronically stimulated bureaucrats of modern capitalism is enough to dismiss that aspect of the cited incidents. We must, however, note that these were *social* situations, creativity conceived with an understanding of human *play* that implicitly negates "politics" as well as politicians.

What then is the organization of men [sic] that can realize the permanent reign of free play, that unleashes the power Wallace (among others) wishes to keep in chains? This organization begins with the individual and ends with the elimination of everything that exists independently of individuals. When everyday working man [sic] comes to realize that he is powerless over his own life and knows why, he is a proletarian. This proletarian consciousness has found itself in social practice with the spontaneous organization of councils (Russia in 1905, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956, etc.) The slogan remains "All power to the Workers Councils," translated into daily life, and this time without amendment or afterthought. To create the situation that makes turning back impossible, the power of councils is defined by: the dissolution of all external (separate) power; direct and total democracy; the practical unification of decision and execution; the delegate, strictly mandated, subject to immediate recall; the abolition of all hierarchies and independent specializations; the **GESTION AND CONSCIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF ALL ASPECTS OF LIBERATED LIFE**; the permanent, creative participation of individuals; international extension and coordination. So that the last laugh will never be heard, the celebration never end.



# Concerning Nantes

*Internationale Situationniste* #12, September 1969

Translated by Point Blank (early 1970s)

Under an extremely presumptuous title, *The Nantes Commune* (Ed. Maspero, May 1969), a certain Yannick Guin evokes the occupations movement at Nantes, propagating the inevitable banality of *modern leftism*: at Nantes there would have been an outline of "dual power"; the Inter-Union Strike Committee had effectively taken control of the town to a degree parallel, if not greater than that of the prefect. It is known that leftist minorities and revolutionary syndicalists wield an influence among the unions of the Loire-Atlantic area (in the F.O. and even in the C.F.D.T.) beyond any proportion to their national reality, an influence which is tied to certain traditions of workers' struggles and economic conditions existing locally.

In the big strike of 1953, the outline of the Central Strike Committee's insurrectional power was clearly manifested at Nantes: it was a nice vestige of the revolutionary possibilities that syndicalism has formerly contained, during a period when the workers' movement had generally been wiped out. In 1968 the situation was completely different. The decisive contribution of the Nantese, after the sabotage conducted from the academic milieu by the revolutionary group of "students" who held the local office of the U.N.E.F. (Yvon Chotard, Quillot, etc.) and who were the first in France to bring the red flag and the black flag back into the streets together, was certainly the exploit of the workers of Sud-Aviation who inaugurated the occupation of the factories on May 14 [1968]. But, from this exemplary action alone, it is wrong to consider Nantes as a separate point in the May movement. May was essentially a nation-wide wildcat strike -- and not a "mass strike" as the bureaucrats, and those who don't dare distinguish themselves from them, bashfully say. The strike didn't become "mass" through a kind of mechanical innocence, like a reaction observed in a laboratory, *with* the unions who never wanted to declare a "general strike" and who have since then forbidden them to use this classic term: in fact, the strike was extended *against* [the unions]. Thus, while for the first time a revolutionary workers' current was already struggling throughout the country against the unions, the pseudo-Commune of Nantes, with its governing Inter-Union, found itself far behind the newest and profoundest things in the occupations movement.

Next to the ordinary idiocies that make up this terrible book, Guin devoted a large space to often exact, although always maliciously presented anecdotes concerning the highly important contribution of the revolutionary "students" of Nantes. One of these anecdotes, at least, is pure fiction. It can be read in his fourth chapter: "In reality, the true influence sprang from the Situationist International, with which many exchanges were carried out. But here again the Nantes particularism was manifest. Thus one saw [Raoul] Vaneigem, the S.I.'s principal thinker, landing at Nantes and introducing himself to the local of the A.G.E.N. He demanded to see Chotard immediately. They willingly answered that no one knew where he was. Vaneigem had to wait an entire afternoon, enduring the smiles of the Nantes students."

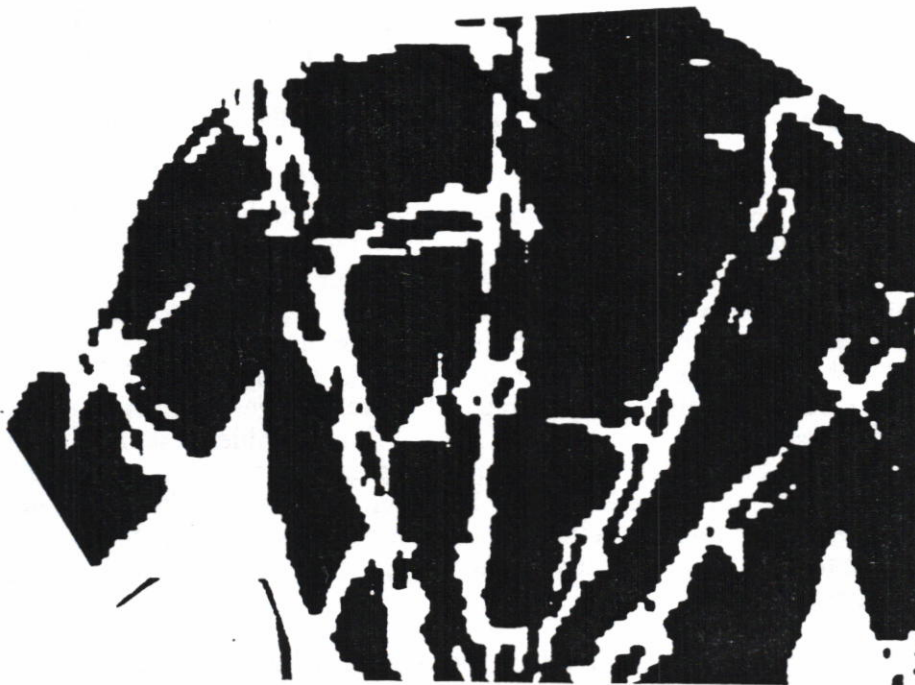
The events in this *detective story* were never witnessed by anyone, except the author who invented them. Vaneigem and a *worker comrade* went to Nantes as delegates of the Council for the Maintenance of the Occupations [C.M.D.O.]. They found Chotard at the very moment of their arrival. They certainly didn't have any "order" to give to a completely autonomous revolutionary group, just as much in regard to the S.I. as to the C.M.D.O. Vaneigem, whose name was somewhat known in Nantes, took precautions not to put himself in the position of celebrity, even refusing to address a meeting as the Nantese invited him to do. The delegates of the C.M.D.O. restricted themselves to exchanging information with the revolutionaries of Nantes: the latter had previously sent several comrades (Chotard among them) to Paris two or three times, who were received equally quickly and cordially by the C.M.D.O., as was natural. They certainly didn't come to search for orders in Paris, and nobody, happily, ever thought of notifying them about it. It follows that they didn't come to give us any [orders], either.

In fact, if several Nantes radicals -- having had during the year preceding the occupations movement



many discussions and exchanges of letters, on a clearly specified base of autonomy and equality -- had evolved towards many, but not all, of our positions, it was done in pure freedom, through the result of their own thoughts, and above all their concrete experience. They had no organizational link with us, neither open nor concealed; and still less was there the slightest trace of subjection, which in any case we didn't want, and which they certainly wouldn't have wanted any more than we.

The subsequent events seems to show that what for us was very evident didn't appear so simple to all of [the Nantes radicals], and that even this question obscurely annoyed certain people. After reading Guin's book, the S.I. wrote the Nantese to ask them how they reckoned on reacting to this slander, and also if they knew exactly of the existence of this Guin. On this last point, they thought they had to make a dilatory response. And on the first, they wrote us that the slander aimed at Vaneigem was nothing more than a mere detail in a generally slanderous book, and that they didn't think, as we did, that squashing slanderers was a "revolutionary duty." They comically deemed themselves to have superceded the problem by rejecting a short time period previously all reference to the academic terrain, and by setting themselves up as the "Council of Nantes." Without examining here the problem of the validity of a voluntarist proclamation of a proletarian councilist organization existing simply on the margin of the academic milieu, and with the same source of recruitment, we considered that the *lack of rigor* of the comrades of the Council of Nantes unfortunately revealed that they didn't appropriate the truth of the *only* lesson, which, without any ill-timed disgrace, they would assuredly have had to have *learned from us*. Despite what we have always considered as highly valuable in their 1968 activity -- and notably as concerns Yvon Chotard, whose intentions and remarkable revolutionary capacities are recognized by us -- the S.I. immediately broke off all relations with all the members of the actual Council of Nantes. (Let us point out that Juvenal Quillot let us know a short time later that, since his signature had been improperly put on a leaflet of the Council of Nantes, he [also] disassociated himself from it at once.)





# What Makes ICO Lie?

*Internationale Situationniste* #12, September 1969

Translated by Point Blank (early 1970s)

In the preceding number of this review (October 1967), we mentioned the many points of agreement we thought we had with the people who publish the bulletin *Informations Correspondance Ouvrieres*, without hiding our disagreement over their refusal to "formulate a precise theoretical critique of real society" and making it clear on the other hand that we didn't know them directly. A few of the people who are among us today had had the occasion to know them directly in the meantime, but it will be seen that that is not the only reason for our not knowing them better.

At that time, all we knew about ICO was what we learned from reading its bulletin: that it was an anti-union, predominantly anarchist group. That having been explained, it was not surprising to see them talk about councils without daring to define themselves as councilists, nor to read in their platform ("Who We Are: What We Want") of their definition of their action: "All we can do is furnish them [the workers] with information, in the same respect as they can give us some." That which *On the Poverty of Student Life* called ICO's choice of nonexistence only partially recuperates its reality.

ICO exists and this existence is weighted down heavily enough by lies of omission, secret hierarchy, and direct exhaustion. A member of the group of Enrages (Rene Riesel) attended a meeting of the ICO at the end of March 1968. Since he was asked to, he gave an account of his group's activities, and of the situation in the University of [redacted] and Nanterre. This report was published in the issue of ICO that followed this meeting, in a hostile style and with a great deal of misconceptions. Surprised by this malevolence, but all the same conscious of the source of the action (people from *Noir et Rouge* participating in the ICO, friends of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the March 22d Movement), the Enrages called by letter for the publication of a severely critical *flier*. At the next meeting, the March 22d Movement dispatched a delegate who demanded the joint publication of a response to the *flier*. The Enrages accepted. Alleging that it was inelegant to mention people one attacked by name (Cohn-Bendit in this instance, who already had the attention of all the daily papers), the ICO's bosses never published the *flier*.

The elegance of these people, on a par with the discretion which makes them conceal their opponent's names and texts, is easily perceived. The reason behind it lies in the fact that, however unnatural they may want that to be believed, ICO has an opposition. And it is more in their alacrity to disguise this triviality than in the virtuous antipathy to the printed page, where one finds the explanation of the rage which seized them when a certain number of revolutionaries wrote them to establish contact at the end of the note "Reading ICO" that appeared in *IS* #11 (October 1967). In a leaflet dated 27 April 1968, ICO complained about the criticisms "of a group of students called the 'Enrages,' influenced by the situationists, who have manifested a sudden interest in ICO." All of a sudden, the mini-proprietors of ICO saw themselves as centers of attention! And they made it clear that it could only have been caused by "ideologues" and the troublesomeness of "ethics" -- however, they aren't referring to their old friend Rubel -- for the true class struggle "unfolds on the economic terrain and beyond all 'consciousness' (in the ideological sense of the term)." Can their adversaries and the workers be any better slighted at the same time? And historical reality?

If ICO pretends to offer more than information, it is in return required that nothing more be asked of them. The degree of participation required of its members is thus nothing but their capacity to meet once a month to repeat the same old obvious facts incessantly, communicate the same old information about the same old undertakings discouraged from the start, and bring up again at the following session the discussion of the group's general orientation. When new people try and throw their spanner in the works, the machine stops long enough to tire them out. Finally, one can write that, "Sooner or later comrades who pursue other ends (invariably the propagation of an ideology in one form or another) expel themselves on their own initiative for some reason or other, that is to say, they stop coming." This



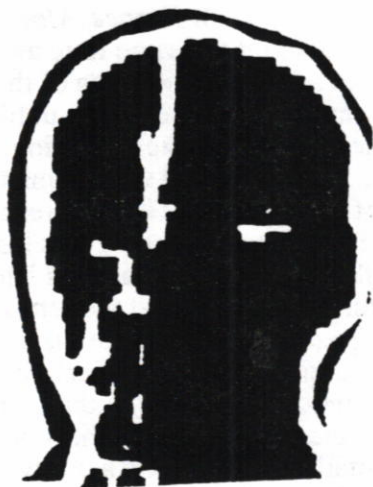
hypocritical tone should dispel any illusions: when "comrades" clearly saw that they intend to steer the discussion towards the interior of the group, on the basis of affirmed principles, not to negate them, but to go beyond them, to supersede primary economism and to attempt a critique of daily life as well, ICO shows them the door because their text is too long! And when the same "comrades" print it themselves, ICO refuses to send them the list of subscribers. Five or six oppositionals whom we do not know were expelled in this manner at the beginning of 1968. Two months later, the same problem was brought up anew by others.

The fact that the Enrages approached ICO at the same instant seemed to ICO's masters to reveal a vast conspiracy aimed at undermining the perpetuity [of their power] over the group. That is no doubt why, while minimizing the impact of the movement when it began to take shape, they preferred the March 22d Movement against the Enrages. The Cohn-Benditist wing with which they were in contact sufficiently guaranteed the formal nonexistence and the absence of coherent theory of the March 22d Movement, by means of which ICO placed their confidence in it: at least three students wouldn't butt into the affairs of the ICO's conscious workers.

This consciousness goes no further than their sense of the ridiculous. The lamentable analyses of their May '68 issue, which appeared at the moment when a major confrontation could be anticipated without extrapolation, and which wanted to prove the inanity and inadequacy of the struggle undertaken, have at least enough of the comic in them so that they don't say at what moment these shrewd observers of historical conjuncture ever noticed that "something happened" (*The Mass Strike in France, May-June 1968*, ICO/Noir et Rouge pamphlet). One can imagine that they did so at about the same time as the Stalinist [Communist] Party. Nothing contradicts this hypothesis, not even the identical use of the term "general strike" to designate the occupations movement. ICO didn't jump on the bandwagon until the day when the old mole dug under the cafe in which they ordinarily met, disturbing the unfolding of their monthly meeting by the echo of the explosions of police grenades. Like the so-called Communist Party, ICO essentially sees in the occupations movement an accumulation of local strikes. The difference only resides in the fact that ICO *knows and says* that they were wildcat strikes. Thus, "May '68 was from this point of view (the evolution towards an autonomy of conflicts) only the brutal expression of a latent situation that had been developing over the years, in rigorous conformity with the rapid modernization of French capitalism." Only with the incredible gall of these people is it possible to minimize the occupations movement in this way without laughing, while recognizing on a suddenly lyrical note that "the great mass of workers entered the struggle driven by the will to change something in the system of exploitation." [These hypothetical workers] would be able to see that "the realization of a new world in which their intervention will be total, that is to say, where they will totally manage their activity in their work, and, consequently, in their life" will pass for the explanation of the mystery which presents ICO with these realities as separated.

Who are these undeceived partisans of the wildcat strike trying to kid when they weightily explain in analyzing the class struggles in France in March 1969 ("Organizations and the Workers' Movement"), that since the wildcat strikes before May were directed towards categorical demands, and since in these after May "the workers of a limited sector of the business did not want any part of anything anyone imposed on them that was *solely* concerned with their working conditions (salaries or whatever), one there finds the character of the wildcat strikes in Holland, England, and the USA." [The ICO writes:] "Certain people will want to see in these many strikes the beginning of a generalization of the struggles, or a transformation of the struggles or of a radical transformation of the workers' movement. If May had at the same time acted as a revealing force and thus accelerated an evolution, it did not radically modify the context of these struggles." Incapable of seeing that a union doesn't just support a wildcat strike so as to get around it, but because it is far preferable to them to lose it in the meanderings of a legal strike, ICO's realists show themselves to be even more stupid than the cretins of *Lutte Ouvriere*: "The intransigence of the bosses and the government forced them (the unions) to organize a central demonstration on March 11" -- granting that the strike of March 11, 1969 "was a part of this political exploitation of the workers' movement." It is surely because they don't beat the drum for any other position than that which they already have -- as almost acknowledged specialists of anti-unionism -- that ICO's "workers" can predict a beautiful future for us: "the conquest of a large number of seats in municipal and other councils." As for the *workers*, ICO forgets a little too easily what the revolutionary movement does to its slanderers.

The hatred of ICO for everything that resembles theory doesn't stem from a contempt towards their student militants or their intellectual friends, which would be justified. The objective directors of ICO have themselves been turned into intellectuals simply by pressing the button. Now they wish that real intellectuals would come and relieve them in this arduous task so that they can devote themselves full-time to ICO's preservation, which they know has nothing to lose but an illusory existence. Students will heed their call, but revolutionaries will know that they can *read* ICO to find the anti-union ideology of the *groupuscules* in it.





# Reform and Counter-reform in Bureaucratic Power

Unattributed; trans. Gyllene Flottan, 1970

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You could say that the only task of the history of the last twenty years was to refute Trotsky's analysis of the bureaucracy. As a victim of "class subjectivism," he -- for his whole life -- regarded Stalinist practice as just a temporary deviation by a *stratum* of usurpers, a "Thermidorian reaction." As the ideologist of the Bolshevik Revolution, Trotsky could never be the theoretician of the proletarian revolution at the time of the Stalinist restoration. By refusing to admit what the bureaucracy in power is -- a new exploiting class -- Trotsky, the Hegel of the revolution betrayed, deprived himself of the possibility of really criticizing it. The theoretical and practical impotence of Trotskyism (in all its variations) is to a great extent explained by this "original sin" of the master.

In *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupations Movement* (written by *Rene Vane*, published by Gallimard, Paris 1968, page 20), we said -- a month before the Russian invasion [of Czechoslovakia] -- that

the bureaucratic appropriation of society is inseparable from a totalitarian possession of the State and its ideology's absolute domination. The absence of censorship and the guarantee of freedom of expression makes, in immediate terms, the following alternatives possible in Czechoslovakia: either a repression, where the artificial character of these concessions is admitted, or an attack by the proletariat against the bureaucracy's proprietorship of the State and the economy, which would be revealed as soon as the dominant ideology had to do without permanent police supervision for a time. The outcome of such a conflict is very much of interest to the Russian bureaucracy, whose own existence will be threatened by a victory for the Czech workers.

How it is settled: the first alternative, with the assistance of "Soviet" tanks, was chosen. The basis of Moscow's absolute domination over the so-called socialist countries is the following golden rule, proclaimed and practiced by the Russian bureaucracy: "Socialism is not to go any further than our army." Everywhere this army has been the principle force and has installed "communist" parties to power, it is accordingly the same army that has the last word each time its former proteges show such leanings toward independence that [the proteges] might threaten the totalitarian bureaucratic domination. The Russian socioeconomic system has from the beginning been the *ideal type* for the new bureaucratic regimes. But this loyalty to the archetype has often conflicted with the demands of the dominated societies themselves; as the interests of the dominating class in each satellite bureaucracy do not necessarily coincide with those of the Russian bureaucracy, the inter-bureaucratic relations have always been marked by the latest conflicts. Put between the hammer and the anvil, the satellite bureaucrats have always in the end obeyed the hammer each time the proletarian forces showed their will for autonomy. Neither in Poland, in Hungary, nor recently in Czechoslovakia does the national bureaucratic "revolt" attain anything more than the replacement of one bureaucrat with another.

As the first industrial state conquered by Stalinism, Czechoslovakia for twenty years has had a "privileged" position in the system of international exploitation, set up in 1949 by the Russians, inside the framework of "the socialist division of labor" ruled by Comecon. The unconcealed totalitarianism of the Stalinist era meant that after their seizure of power, the Czech Stalinists just humbly had to imitate "the universal socialist system." Contrary to other bureaucratic countries, where there was a real need for economic development (industrialization), the high level of the Czech productive forces was in complete opposition to the objects of the new regime's economic planning. After fifteen years of ineffective bureaucratic administration, the Czech economy was on the brink of ruin and, from that time on, a reform of the economy became a matter of life and death for the ruling class. These are the roots of the



"Prague Spring" and the adventurous liberalization tried by the bureaucracy. But before we begin to analyze this "bureaucratic reform," let us look at its origins, that is, the balance sheet of the purely Stalinist (or Novotnyist) period.

After the Prague coup, and as it was integrated into the almost totally self-supporting economic system of the East, Czechoslovakia became the principal victim of Russian domination. Because it was the most highly developed country [in the Eastern bloc], Czechoslovakia had to pay for the industrialization of its neighbors, whom themselves were submitted to an overexploiting system. From 1950 onwards, the totalitarian planning, with its emphasis on heavy metallurgy and engineering, threw the economic totally out of balance, a state of affairs that steadily grew worse. Investments in Czech heavy industry had to bear an interest of 47 percent in 1966 -- the highest figure in the world. It was a consequence of this situation that Czechoslovakia had to provide raw materials and manufactured goods (machines, arms and so forth) to the "Soviet" Union and to the other so-called socialist countries (and thus to the much coveted "Third World") at ridiculously low prices that did not even cover the amortization of the production costs and normal wear-and-tear. (The "Soviet" Union has emptied a reserve of uranium ore in Jachmov, Boehmen -- estimated to contain 50 years' worth of ore -- in only five years.) "Production for the sake of production" was the ideology that accompanied this enterprise, which the workers had to pay for first of all. When the workers in Pilsen -- who saw their wages getting lower, and prices getting higher as a consequence of a monetary reform -- revolted in 1953, they were violently repressed at once. Accordingly, the consequences of this economic policy were the following: the Czech economy's ever-increasing dependence on "Soviet" deliveries of raw materials and fuel; the orientation of this economy towards exterior interests; the very perceptible lowered standard of living resulting from cuts in real wages; and, not least, falling national income, which fell from an average of 8.5% in the 1950 to 1960 years, to 0.7% in 1962. From the first time in the history of a so-called social country, the national income fell in 1963 instead of rising. This development became the alarm signal for the new reforms. Ota Sik calculated that four times as much investment was needed in order to attain in 1968 the same growth in national income experienced in 1958. From that moment on, it was admitted that "the country of Czechoslovakia is really in a period of great structural imbalance, with moderate tendencies of inflation appearing everywhere in life and in society, especially in foreign trade, the home market and investments" (*Foreign Trade of Czechoslovakia*, October 1968).

Voices were heard that expressed the vital necessity of reforming the economy. Professor Ota Sik and his collaborators began to prepare their reform plan, which more or less would be accepted in 1965. The new plan of Ota Sik criticized rather boldly the economic activity of the preceding years. It touched upon the Russian guardianship and proposed that the economy should be loosened from strict central planning and opened up to the world market. In order to be able to do this, one had to abandon the simple imitation, give up the system of "production for the sake of production" (now declared an antisocialist crime, whereas before it was extolled as a principle for this selfsame socialism), lower the costs of production and raise the production index, which had fallen from 7.7 percent in 1960 to 3.1 percent in 1962 and kept on falling thereafter.

This plan, a technocratic reform model, was applied in 1965 and took effect in 1967. It required a radical showdown with the methods of administration that suppress every initiative: instead, "one should now 'interest' the producers in the results of their work, make some enterprises autonomous, reward success, punish losses, promote the success of profit-making industries and enterprises with the appropriate technical measures, and by degrees reestablish the market by making prices coincide with those on the world market" (Ota Sik). Because the programme was opposed by the diehard administration cadres, it was applied only partially. The Novotnyist bureaucracy began to realize the dangerous consequences of such an enterprise. The temporary rise in prices, which was not compensated for by a corresponding increase in wages, gave this backward strata a pretext to reject the project in the eyes of the workers. Novotny himself stood up as a defender of the interests of the working class and openly criticized the new steps during a speech to an assembly of workers in 1967. But the "liberal" wing, being conscious of the real interests of the Czech bureaucracy, counterattacked with the support of the population. As a journalist in *Kulturni Tyorba* stated on 5 January 1967, it was "as if for some of the people the new economic system was equal to the need to change," to *change everything*. This was the first link in a developing chain that was bound to lead to important social and political changes. The conservative bureaucracy, which lacked real support, was forced to make an official apology and, one by one, leave



the political stage of the country: resistance meant an explosion similar to the one in Budapest in 1956. When the writers -- who, like the filmmakers, had been permitted a certain degree of freedom in practicing their aesthetic vocations -- held their fourth conference in June 1967, it was changed into a long, single sustained accusation against the regime. Gathering their last forces, the "conservatives" reacted by expelling a certain number of radical intellectuals from the Party and put the writers' journal under the direct control of the minister.

But the wind of insurrection blew ever harder and nothing could now prevent the opposition of the people to the prevailing state of affairs in Czech society. A student demonstration against an electricity break was beaten down by the police when it was designated a protest against the regime. One of the first discoveries that resulted from this experience was to become a password in the later struggles: the absolute demand to *tell the truth*, stressing "the astounding contradictions between theory and practice." In a system that is founded on the permanent lie of ideology, such a demand for the truth simply became revolutionary, and the intellectuals were not slow to complete the thought. In the bureaucratic systems, where nothing escapes the totalitarianism of the Party-State, a protest against the slightest of details in social life necessarily calls into question *all* prevailing conditions and brings forth a human protest against the whole inhuman organization of life. Even if the protest of the students was limited to the University of Prague, it concerned all the alienated features of Czech life, which were rejected as unacceptable. The neo-bureaucracy lead the movement and tried to keep it inside the narrow framework of its reform: in January 1968 a "programme of action" that approved of the rise of Dubcek and his collaborators, and the fall of Novotny, was accepted. Besides the fact that the economic plan of Ota Sik definitely was taken and integrated into this new programme, a certain number of changes in the political order were strongly confirmed by the new regime. Nearly all of the bourgeois regime's formal "freedoms" were guaranteed, which meant a totally unique track for the bureaucratic regime. This shows how much was at stake and how serious the situation was. The radical elements who took advantage of the concessions made by the bureaucracy could later show that these concessions were only "objectively necessary" in order to preserve the dominance of the bureaucracy. The most liberal among the newly-appointed members -- Smrkovsky -- made the truth about bureaucratic liberalism very clear in his naive way: "Considering that the development, even in a socialist country, is a continuous struggle between different interests on the economic, social and political levels, we must find a *political way of governing* that allows a regulation of all conflicts in our society and excludes the necessity of extraordinary administrative interferences." But the new bureaucracy did not understand that by saying no to these "extraordinary administrative interferences" -- which in fact is the *normal* way for a bureaucracy to govern a society -- it placed itself in a position in which it had to face a merciless radical critique. The opening up of cultural and political freedoms of speech and the right of free assembly turned out to become a true orgy of critical truth. The idea that the Party "in the base organizations, too," ought to take advantage of the natural and spontaneous authority founded on the general ability of the officials of the "Community" Party (the Action Programme) was rejected everywhere, and demands for autonomous workers' organizations were raised here and there. In the end of the Spring of 1968, the Dubcek bureaucracy created the ridiculous impression that it wanted to have its cake and it eat, too. It stressed again its intention to keep for its a political monopoly. "If anti-Communist elements try to question this historical fact [the right of the Party to lead the people], the Party will mobilize all the forces of the people and of the socialist State in order to stop and annihilate such foolish attempts" (Resolution of the Central Committee, June 1968). But having allowed the majority of the Party to participate in all decisions, how could one expect ordinary people to suppress their own will to participate? Sitting on top of Power and playing the fiddle, how can one not expect the people down there from starting to dance?

From this moment on, one can see how the revolutionary tendencies begin to turn into a critique of liberal formalism and its ideology. Up until this moment, the democracy, like the dictatorship, had in a way been "forced upon the masses": that is, without their real participation. Everyone knew that Novotny had come to power as a representative of the Liberation and that a Gomulka-type return had menaced the Ducek movement from the start. One does not change a society by changing the few men in power, but by revolutionizing it. Soon one started to criticize the Bolshevik idea of a vanguard party and demanded an autonomous organization of the proletariat, something that was synonymous with the impending death of the bureaucracy. This depends on the fact that, for the bureaucracy, the proletariat can only exist as *fictive* power; the bureaucracy empties the proletariat of its content -- and tries to do so



-- until it is only a fiction of what it really is, and the bureaucracy wants this fiction to remain so that even the proletariat believes in its existence. Because the power of the bureaucracy is founded on ideological formulae that it turns into its *formal* goals, it everywhere comes into conflict with its *real* goals. Everywhere where the bureaucracy has seized the State and the economy, and where the common interest of the State is turned into an autonomous and consequently *real* interest, it begins to fight against the proletariat in the same way as every consequence fights against the existence of its own presumptions.

But the movement of criticism, which had appeared as a consequence of the bureaucratic reforms -- only went halfway. It never got the opportunity to show itself in all its practical consequences. And the great majority of the people had hardly begun their own theoretical and merciless critique of the "bureaucratic dictatorship" and Stalinist totalitarianism when the neo-bureaucracy -- in order to defend itself -- began a hue and cry about the Russian menace, which already in May was a reality. You might say that the primary weak point of the Czech movement was that the working-class never stepped forward as an autonomous and decisive force in practice. Phrases about "self-management" and "workers' councils" could be found in Ota Sik's technocratic reform programme, but they -- because the reform originated in the bureaucracy -- never did mean anything else than a democratic "administration" on the Yugoslavian model. And the same is true for the reply to this reform, probably elaborated by trade-unions and presented at the Wilhelm Pieck mechanical factory on 29 June. The critique of Leninism represents the highest point reached by theoretical criticism in a bureaucratic country. Even Dutschke and his "anarcho-Maoism" was ridiculed and rejected with malice by the revolutionary Czech students as "absurd, comical and not even worthy of the interest of a fifteen-year-old child." This criticism was still accepted and even encouraged by Dubcek as long as it could be regarded as a legitimate rejection of "Stalino-Novotnyan mistakes." But it could not end in anything but a *practical interrogation of the power of the bureaucratic class*. It is true that the bureaucracy usually condemns its own mistakes, but only as if they had been committed by *others*; it is enough for the bureaucracy to take a part of itself, call it autonomous, and then blame it for all the anti-proletarian crimes committed by the bureaucracy. (Since time immemorial, the purge is the method preferred by the bureaucracy to maintain its power.) As in Poland and Hungary, one found in Czechoslovakia that the best way to make the people support the ruling class is to evoke nationalistic feelings. The greater the Russian menace, the greater the power of the Dubcek bureaucracy; one can imagine that its most ardent wish must have been to have Polish troops at the frontier forever. But sooner or later, the Czech proletariat would have found out during its struggle that it is not enough to know what a certain bureaucrat or the bureaucracy as a whole is aiming at for the moment; but that the important thing is to know what the bureaucracy is in reality and what in reality it is forced to do. And the proletariat would have acted accordingly.

What haunted the Russian bureaucracy and its satellites was just the fear that the proletariat would follow its reasoning to its logic end. Friends, imagine a Russian (or East German) bureaucrat in the middle of this "ideological" witches' cauldron! Imagine how tormented and confused his brain, which is as sick as his power, must have been! How frightened he must have been by all this talk about independence and workers' councils, about the bureaucratic dictatorship over workers and intellectuals and the threat they posed to defend what they had gained with arms in their hands! Imagine this and you will understand that the Russian bureaucrat, in this confusion -- which boiled with liberty and truth, conspiracy and revolution -- shouted to his Czech colleagues: "Rather an end with terror than a terror without end!"

If ever something had been predictable long before it really happened, this something is the Russian intervention, which everyone who has grasped modern history saw very clearly. Prepared for a long time and, inspite of all its international consequences, [the intervention] was in a way inevitable. By questioning the omnipotent power of the bureaucracy, Dubcek's daring but necessary experiment became a threat against the bureaucracy in all its forms all over the world. Therefore, it could no longer be tolerated. Six hundred thousand soldiers -- almost as many as the American force in Vietnam -- put a brutal stop to it all. And when the "anti-socialist" and "counterrevolutionary" forces, which the bureaucrats all the time had invoked and called forth, finally appeared, it was not under the portrait of Benes or with arms from the "German revanchist," but in the uniform of the so-called Red Army.

For seven days -- "The Glorious Seven Days" -- nearly all the population displayed a magnificent



resistance against the intruders. Paradoxically, one could find typical revolutionary methods appear in the service of a reformist bureaucracy. But all that which had not been realized during the course of the reformist movement could not be realized during the occupation: when the Russian troops stood at the frontiers, Dubcek used their presence to stop the development of the revolutionary movement, and, on the afternoon of August 21st, he was presented with the opportunity to get control over the whole movement of resistance. A situation was created that was in some ways similar to that in North Vietnam, where the population is made one and all to support a bureaucracy that exploits them.

The primary reflex of the people of Prague, however, was not to defend the House of Parliament, but the Broadcast Center, considered to be the symbol of their principal conquest: true information versus the organized lie. And the nightmare of all the bureaucracies of the Warsaw Pact nations -- the press and the radio -- was going to ride them for one more week. The Czech experience has unmasked the extraordinary possibilities of struggle, of which an organized revolutionary movement might one day explore. It was the equipment of the Warsaw Pact nations -- in view of a possible imperialist invasion of Czechoslovakia -- that enabled the native journalists to establish 35 secret transmitters. Thus "Soviet" propaganda -- urgently needed by an occupying army -- had been sabotaged at the base. Consequently, people could learn about almost everything happening in the country, and could listen to the appeals of the liberal bureaucrats as well as those of the radical elements who controlled certain radio stations. As the result of a broadened appeal to sabotage the operations of the Russian police, Prague was turned into a true "city of labyrinths," where all the streets lost their names and the houses their numbers in order to be drowned in words that were reminiscent of the revolutionary feast in May [1968]. The city became a nest of freedom that made fun of all the cops, and thus provided an example of a revolutionary way to nullify carceral urbanism. Thanks to an excellent organization on the side of the proletariat, *all* the papers could be freely printed and distributed right below the nose of the Russians, who were ridiculous enough to occupy the papers' editorial offices. Several factories were turned into printing houses, wherefrom thousands of papers and leaflets were distributed. Even a fake issue of *Pravda* was printed in Russian. The XIVth Party Congress could clandestinely meet for three days, protected by the workers of Auto-Praha. Through this congress, "Operation Kadar" was checkmated, and the Russians were forced to negotiate with Dubcek. Relying, on the one side, on their own troops, and on the other side on the internal contradictions of the Czech bureaucracy, the Russians, however, managed to turn the liberal party faction into some sort of disguised "Vichy regime." Thinking of his future, Husak became the main spokesman for canceling the XIVth Congress (on the pretext that the Slovak delegates were absent, an absence apparently recommended by him). The next day, about the "Moscow Agreements," he declared, "We can accept this agreement in accordance with which *sensible men* (our emphasis) may guide the people out of the present blind alley in such a way that it will be spared from feeling ashamed in the future."

When they become revolutionaries, the Czech proletariat will be spared from feeling ashamed of having trusted Husak, Dubcek and Smrkovsky. They know already that now they can trust none but their own forces; they know that Dubcek and Smrkovsky will betray them in turn, as the neo-bureaucracy has betrayed them collectively by submitting to the Russians and obeying their totalitarian policy. The sentimental pledging to one individual or another is part of the past era in the history of the proletariat, that is, part of the old world. The strikes in November and the suicides slowed down the "normalization" a little. It could not be brought to an end until April 1969. By ascending in its old shape, the bureaucratic power felt the defeat much harder. One by one, all the illusions had been shattered, and the lining up of the Czech masses behind the reformed bureaucracy is gone into the wind. Rehabilitating the "collaborators," the reformists now have lost their last chance of popular support in the future. The harder the repression, the firmer the consciousness of the workers and the students. The return to the "restricted and foolish spirit of the fifties," and its methods, already results in violent reactions from the workers and students. The most serious anxiety that Dubcek has left as a legacy to his successors and their masters is just the various forms of collaboration between workers and students. Now the workers declare "their inalienable right to reply to possible extreme measures" with "their own extreme countermeasures" (motion from the workers at CKD to the Minister of Defense, 22 April 1969). The restoration of Stalinism shows once and for all the illusory character of each bureaucratic reformism and the inborn inability of the bureaucracy to "liberalize" its management of society. Its feigned "Human Socialism" means nothing but the introduction of some bourgeois concessions in the totalitarian world; and already these concessions ruin it. The sole possible *humanization* of "bureaucratic socialism"



consists in the revolutionary proletariat crushing it, not by some sort of "political revolution," but by a total overthrow of the international bureaucracy.

The riots of 21 August 1969 have proved the degree to which *ordinary Stalinism* has been reestablished in Czechoslovakia, and, furthermore, the degree to which it is threatened by the critique of the proletariat: ten killed, 2,000 arrested and the threat of exiling or trying Dubcek the Marionette do not stop the strike from spreading like wildfire all over the nation. Thus do the Czech workers directly threaten the economic system of their native-born and Russian exploiters.

The case the Russian intervention has succeeded in braking the objective process of transformation in Czechoslovakia, international Stalinism will surely have paid dearly for this. The bureaucratic powers, from Cuba to Hanoi -- directly depending on the so-called Soviet State -- have been forced to applaud the intervention of their masters, to the great embarrassment of their Trotskyist and Surrealist admirers and of the "good conscience" of the Left. With outstanding cynicism, Castro has fully justified the military intervention, which, according to him, became necessary as a consequence of the threats to reestablish capitalism. In these words he reveals the truth about his own "socialism." Hanoi and the Arab bureaucracies, themselves victims of a foreign occupation, drive their logic into absurdity when they support a similar aggression for the simple reason that this time it proceeds from their superior protectors.

As to the members of the international bureaucracy who are now weeping over the fate of Czechoslovakia, they all do so because of their own *national* reasons. Immediately following the heavy blow with which the revolutionary crisis of May 1968 hit the French Communist Party, the Czech affair knocked the Party once more: now it is split into archaic, new and orthodox Stalinist factions, which are torn between loyalty to Moscow and their own interests in the bourgeois political schema. If the Italian Communist Party has been bolder in its condemnation of the Russian intervention, it is because of the looming crisis in Italy, and first and foremost because of the direct violation of its own "Togliattism." In the Czech crisis, the national bureaucracies of Yugoslavia and Romania found an occasion to strengthen their class domination by regaining support from the population, which did not look behind the mask of the more-fictive-than-real Russian menace. Stalinism, already having tolerated Titoism and Maoism as other images of itself, will always be able to overlook some "Romanian independence" as long as it does not directly threaten its "socialist model," which has been faithfully reproduced everywhere. It is unnecessary to speak of the Sino-Albanian critique of "Russian imperialism." In their anti-imperialist delirium, the Chinese at one moment reproach the Russians with not having invaded Czechoslovakia in the way they did in Hungary (cf. *Peking Information*, August 13) and, at another moment, condemn "the loathsome aggression of Breshnev's and Kosygin's fascist clique."

In *Internationale Situationniste* #11, we wrote that, "the dissolution of the international association of totalitarian bureaucracies is now a completed fact." The Czech crisis has done nothing but confirm the advanced decomposition of Stalinism. And this Stalinism would never have been able to everywhere play such a great role in the crushing of the [international] workers' movement had it not been for the consanguinity of the Russian totalitarian model with the bureaucratization of the old *reformist* movement (German Social Democracy and the Second International) and the bureaucratization of modern capitalist production generally. But now, after more than forty years of counterrevolutionary history, the revolution is reanimated everywhere and makes the Occidental as well as the Oriental tyrants tremble when it attacks them both in their differences and in their firm kinship. The bold, isolated protests in Moscow after 21 August announce the revolution that can't fail to break out in *Russia itself*. Henceforth, the revolutionary movement knows its real enemies, and no alienation produced by the two capitalisms -- the private bourgeois and the State bureaucratic -- will any longer escape its critique. Facing the immense tasks awaiting it, the revolutionary movement will no longer waste time, either by fighting phantoms, nor by clinging to illusions.

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# The Conquest of Space in the Time of Power

By Eduardo Rothe

*Internationale Situationniste* #12, September 1969

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1

Science in the service of capital, commodities and the spectacle are nothing other than capitalized knowledge, fetishism of idea and method, alienated image of human thought. Pseudo-dimension of man, its passive knowledge of mediocre reality is the magical justification for a race of slaves.

2

It's been a long time since the power of knowledge has transformed itself into the knowledge of power. Contemporary science, the experimental inheritor of the religion of the Middle Ages, accomplished the same functions in relation to class society: it balances the daily stupidity of men with the eternal intelligence of the specialist. It sings in calculations of the grandeur of the human race, when it is nothing more than the organized sum of its own limitations and alienations.

3

Just as industry, destined to free man from work by machinery, has done nothing up to the present but alienate people from the work of the machines, science -- destined to free man historically and rationally from nature -- has done nothing but alienate them in an irrational and antihistorical society. The mercenary of separate thought, science works for survival, and therefore cannot conceive of life except as a mechanical or moral formula. In practice, it does not conceive of man as subject, nor human thought as action, and it is for this reason that it ignores history as premeditated activity, and makes men "patients" in its hospitals.

4

Founded on the essential fallacy of its function, science can do nothing but lie to itself. And its pretentious mercenaries have inherited from their ancestor priests the taste and necessity for mystery. A dynamic element in the justification of the state, the scientific body jealously guards its corporate laws and the secrets of *Machina ex Deo*, which makes it a despicable sect. It is hardly astonishing, for example, that doctors -- handy-men of the power of work -- have illegible handwriting: it is the police code of monopolized survival.

5

But if the *historical* and *ideological* identification of science with temporal powers clearly shows that it is a servant of the state, and therefore wrongs no one, it was necessary to wait until now to see the last separations disappear between class society and a science that wished to remain neutral and "at the service of Humanity." In practice, the actual impossibility of scientific research and application without having access to enormous means, has placed knowledge -- spectacularly concentrated -- into the hands of power, and has directed it towards the objectives of the state. Today there is no science that is not in the service of the economy, the military and ideology; and the science of ideology reveals its other side, the ideology of science.

6

Power, which cannot tolerate a void, has never forgiven surreal territories for being vague terrains left to



the imagination. Since the origin of class society, we have always placed the unreal source of separated power in the skies. When the state justified itself in terms of religion, the sky was included in the *time* of religion [ie, the After-life]; now that the state wishes to justify itself scientifically, the sky is in the *space* of science. From Galileo to Werner von Braun, there is only one question concerning the ideology of the state: religion wished to preserve its time, and therefore has not been concerned with space. Faced with the impossibility of prolonging its time, power must restore its unbounded space [ie, the space program].

## 7

If the heart transplant is still a miserable artisan technique remaining aware of the chemical and nuclear massacres of science, the "Conquest of the Cosmos" is the greatest spectacular expression of scientific oppression. The spatial scholar is to the small doctor what Interpol is to the policeman on the beat.

## 8

The sky promised once upon a time by the priests in black cassocks has now in fact been seized by the white-uniformed astronauts. Sexless, neutral, super-bureaucratized, the first men to escape through the atmosphere are the stars of a spectacle that floats day and night over our heads, that can master temperatures and distances, and that tramples us from above as the cosmic dust of God. As an example of survival in its most elevated manifestation, the astronauts make, without wishing to do so, a critique of the earth: condemned to orbital flight -- under pain of dying from cold and hunger -- they submissively accept ("technically") the boredom and misery of being satellites. Inhabitants of an urbanism of necessity in their cabins, prisons of scientific gadgets, they are the example -- in vitro -- of their contemporaries who do not escape, in spite of distance, from the designs of power. Publicity panel-men, the astronauts float in space or leap about on the moon to make men march to the time of work.

## 9

And if the Christian astronauts of the Occident and the cosmonaut bureaucrats of the East amuse themselves with metaphysics and secular morals -- Gagarin "did not see God" and Borman prayed for the small Earth -- it is because they workshop their special "command service" that must be at the core of their religion. Remember Exupery, the "saint," who spoke profundities from a great altitude, but whose truth lay in his three-fold role of militarist, patriot and idiot.

## 10

The conquest of space is part of the planetary hope of an economic system that, saturated with commodities, power and spectacle, ejaculates in space when it arrives, drooling with its terrestrial contradictions, at the celestial cunt. A new America, space must serve the state in place of its wars and colonies: employing the producer-consumers who will in this way make possible the supersession of the planet's limitations. Province of accumulation, space is destined to become an accumulation of provinces, for which laws, treaties and international tribunals already exist. A new Yalta, the apportionment of space shows the incapacity of the capitalists and bureaucrats to resolve, here on earth, their antagonisms and their struggles.

## 11

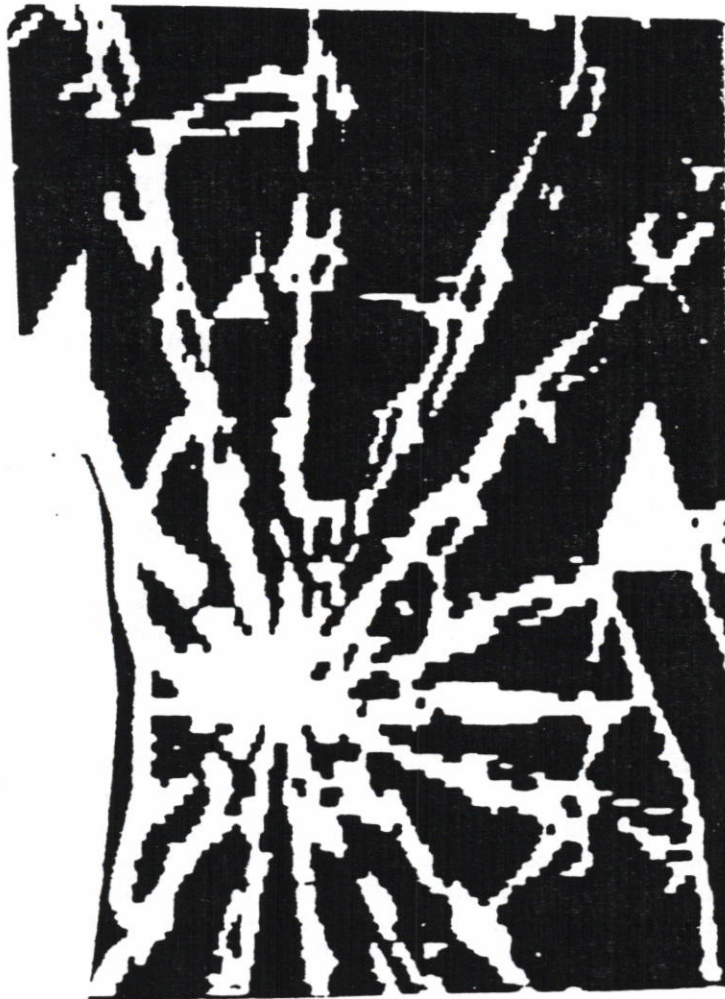
But the old revolutionary mole, which today gnaws at the bases of the system, will destroy the barriers that separate science from the generalized knowledge of historical man. The more ideas of separated power, the more power of separated ideas. Generalized self-management of the permanent transformation of the world by the masses will make science a fundamental banality, and no longer a truth of the state.

## 12

Men [sic] will enter into space to make the universe the playground of the last revolt: that which will go



against the limitations that nature imposes. And, smashing the walls that separate men from science today, the conquest of space will no longer be economic or military "promotion," but the blossoming of human liberties and realizations, attained by a race of gods. We will enter into space, not as employees of an astronomic administration, nor as "volunteers" of a state project, but as masters without slaves who review their domains: the entire universe put in a bag for the Workers' Councils.





# A Field Study in the Dwindling Force of Cognition, Where it is Expected Least

## A Critique of the Situationist International as a Revolutionary Organization

By Robert Chasse and Bruce Elwell, February/March 1970

### THE SERIOUSNESS OF WHAT IS NOT SERIOUS

Early in November 1969, as members of the American section of the SI, we opposed the lack of participation in the projects of the section by the section's other half, [Jon] Horelick and [Tony] Verlaan (then in Europe). We sent them an ultimatum to make clear the seriousness and urgency of the matter. When we got Verlaan's "reaction," we excluded him, not over any failures of his regarding the ultimatum, but as the expression of the realization that there was no possibility of mutual agreement with him (he turned reality on its head). The [other] sections [of the SI] rejected the exclusion as following from the ultimatum (at least not recognizing the distinction which Verlaan's reaction had introduced). It was agreed that the whole matter, of the crisis in the American section, would be taken up and finally resolved at a meeting of the delegates.

Up to that point, we were in the midst of a confused situation that promised resolution. Then, out of the blue, the French section proceeded to exclude us. The act violated the agreement to resolve the matter at a delegates meeting, violated the "provisional statutes" of the organization on such matters, and abrogated direct democratic practice of the ensemble by taking upon itself, a section, the function of decision and execution for all. Pointing to these violations, we resigned in protest. By the time the matter reached the delegates meeting ([held] without us), the delegates bowed to the terms of practice dictated to them by the action of the French section by simply turning its act of exclusion into a proposition for exclusion. The linguistic juggle showed [the delegates] were aware of the violations (that, unless corrected, already assure the bases upon which the members came together no longer hold), and merely expresses their desire to conceal these violations, so the organization may continue to exist.

\* \* \*

This isn't a very serious affair from the point of view of its involving directly, after all, only a few individuals who became divided by what at first was merely a functional problem, aspects of which are at best ridiculous. And it is quite possible that some revolutionaries do not see -- may even deny -- the need for the kind of organization that was the SI (our document assumes that necessity; and we could not here deal with objections from such revolutionaries, if they exist). Finally, the elements of this problem -- being all from the internal functioning of the organization -- are, if not remote, at least not immediate to experience. It has the earmarks of an intramural squabble.

It is also possible -- even probable -- that not all of an organization's internal problems have external ramifications. What is serious is that as a result of this internal crisis, the SI no longer is what it appears to be, at any level, so that, continuing to exist, it must do so as a false revolutionary organization. Expressing a retardation in the organized opposition to the prevailing order, it introduces that retardation into the revolutionary moment developing before us.

It was necessary to make this public, to maintain clarity.

\* \* \*

For completion, we have given a critical narrative of the formation and existence of the [American] section, together with some prefatory notes on the International. This document then is a history, largely,



of the internal organization of the Situationist International, particularly as it existed here [in America].

Following the narrative, it has been our intention to print in appendix (aside from the provisional statutes - which have been included here) at least all of the material relating to the "fall crisis." The material fell almost naturally into three parts: 1) the exchange within the American section, culminating in Verlaan's exclusion; 2) the exchange between us and the other sections, culminating in our resignation; and 3) the aftermath, [the] exchange of letters culminating in their demonstration of the logic of falsification. We added, in a prefatory note to the appendix: "It is an irony that perhaps Gianfranco Sanguinetti will appreciate: that there are over 40 documents here reflecting, in part, the incapacity to communicate." The appendix material was intended to include probably would have been a third again longer than the body of the narrative. Cost prevented us from carrying out this intention. We have decided that we will mimeograph these documents, and make them available, on request.

## HERE WE ROSE TO DANCE

The Situationist International was founded in 1957, the year following the workers councils in Hungary. It was not a body of workers nor one of the disillusioned communists, anarchists or others from the political Left. The first situationists were poets, painters, architects and urbanists who had concluded that the only possible creative act remaining was the construction of *situations* which would recreate daily life on a new basis; all that did not consciously elicit this only worked for the continuation of the show world which dominates.

While it could not have been predicted that this "cultural avant-garde" would pursue its radical implications through the rediscovery of history and of its agent, to a practical grappling with the question of revolutionary organization, it is nonetheless understandable that such a coherent revolutionary organization would first appear out of the "minor" tradition of dada, the surrealists and lettrists, rather than the more obvious revolutionary tradition of the parties and unions. The "cultural" tradition was not embroiled in the problem of the attempt -- or the successful seizure -- of the existing political power, the State. The old labor movement suffered the repercussions from the Social Democratic machine-guns in Germany, the Bolshevik coup in Russia, and the entrance of the anarchists into the Spanish government. (The council communists, who maintained the radical thread, were buried with the rest.) The "cultural" tradition, given its marginal nature and its "lack of seriousness," was incapable of more than daydreams of some "dictatorship of the poets," but with its group projects, continually posed the question of the *nature of social production* while the politicians posed with their portfolios.

At the start, the SI was a rough grouping with many tendencies, where the equality that existed was among these tendencies. This very traditional organizational practice was mitigated by the ascendancy of revolutionary direction: by 1962, those who would not follow the radical implications of their coming together had, for the most part, left the organization to pursue happenings, Provo ideology and a return to the less-taxing world of anti-art art.

After 1962 the SI wrote that it considered itself one group, although several comrades were geographically dispersed in Europe, and the essential of the group's activity was in Paris, where the review was published. Starting from the bases reached by this "small, almost alchemical" coherent group (basically, the present French section, less members who came in after May 1968), the perspective was to re-form national sections having real autonomous activity. The first attempt (1967), in Britain, collapsed, just when that section was to begin its public existence. It was only in late 1968 and in 1969 (after the May events in France) that the SI again found itself formed of national sections -- American, French, Italian and Scandinavian. The struggle of the organization to reconstitute itself as an international on the basis of direct democratic practice finds acute expression in its evolution here [in America].

"Theses on the Paris Commune" -- published in 1962 -- marked the SI's engagement of revolutionary history. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 confirmed that proletarian revolution was returning to sight on the broadened basis elaborated in situationist theory. (It is ironic that the situationist analysis of this signal event -- written [by Guy Debord] in Paris -- stood alone in the world. Shades of Marx and the



Commune.) The seizure of the UNEF chapter at the provincial University of Strasbourg (Autumn 1966) by pro-SI students and the publication of [Mustapha] Khayati's booklet -- *Ten Days That Shook the University* -- brought the SI to national headlines, and international gossip. Situationist writings became the vogue of the "student movement," which around the world has immediately preceded the return of the real thing.

The evolution from an equality of tendencies to an organization formed of the participation of individuals equal in their sharing of a common theory and practice was publicly marked -- before Strasbourg -- with the adoption of the "Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations" at the 7th Conference in Paris [1966].

The definition stated, in part, that the revolutionary organization refuses to reproduce within itself any of the prevailing hierarchical conditions and that "the only limit to participation in its total democracy is that each member recognize and appropriate for himself [sic] the coherence of its critique. The coherence has to be both in the critical theory and in the relationship between the theory and practical activity." Yet the SI was to create implicit hierarchical conditions: adhesion (becoming a member) did not imply *mutual* critical confidence but suggested merely the existing members had the confidence that incoming members had the *possibility* of appropriating not simply the critique but the relationship between it and practical activity. We were to insist that for our part becoming members was the expression of a mutual critical confidence, which itself implied the capacity for autonomous activity. (Naturally, critical confidence involves the necessity of its constant rediscovery and reaffirmation.)

This matter of capacity -- possessed by some, effectively pending in others -- was the condition through which hierarchical relations emerged: the presence of unequal individuals left the way open for some to have to assume the role of decision and execution for all. This we have identified, and will refer to, as the centralist practice of the SI, and against which, through evolving direct democratic practice, it struggled.

We will describe a little later the specific circumstances in which the organization, knowing of our general agreement, picked the moment which seemed to it to our "tactical" advantage to declare us members. We would refuse both the act and the conditions out of which it emerged. But it would take nearly a year before the contradiction -- an organization of equal individuals mitigated by centralist practice -- would be resolved for us. The SI was to accept the correctness of our position before we become members.

Parenthetically: those who became known in the SI as the Garnaultins -- certain members, [including Garnault] largely in Strasbourg -- may have experienced this contradiction: but rather than face it openly, among many members, they formed the secret faction to build, as it were, an "independent power base" to wield against their selected arch-fiend (Debord). They degenerated into the ideology of equality to sustain themselves after they had been confronted with their debilitating practice, and were properly excluded.

There is obviously a distinction between critical confidence that necessitates constant rediscovery and a critical confidence that effectively remains to be established. Horelick claims that he was told by the French section that [Alain] Chevalier -- who was to be excluded in October 1969 -- had been "warned" before he was admitted that he might be excluded, presumably if he failed to reach the expected level in the appropriation of common theory and practice. If this is so, then we have here a situation in which Chevalier, by becoming a member, was not expressing his confidence in [the] other situationists (as well as they in him), so much as the situationists, by making him a member -- on the basis of a certain activity during May 1968 -- expressed their confidence that he would come around. It should be noted, in contradistinction to this, that Debord, in conversation, told [Robert] Chasse that Chevalier shared SI theory and practice, but was weak in the knowledge of historical data: since such data was one of the weapons of the organization, Chevalier would have to acquire [proficiency in] it. Finally, Debord was to write, while Chevalier was still a member, in August 1969 -- in a document internal to and critical of the French section -- that: "I do not believe that there are among us comrades who are not capable of . . . participation (and if by chance there were any among the new situationists, it is evident that we could not reach a conclusion on that point before having gone through the experience of a real collective



activity)." We cannot object if the collective activity is the reaffirmation of a mutual confidence -- even if so for the first time as collective work -- rather than the first expression of its discovery.

- We have brought in these comments and affairs to indicate the fine shadings that the question of participation -- and its possible hierarchization -- can assume. It is in the flux between conceptions and practice -- as they seek out one another -- that the centralist practice inserted itself, particularly, as we note later, when the organization was in a clutch.

In revolutionary perspective, the organizational question is nothing more than the question of the evolution of direct democratic practice. It is -- under the continuing domination of the commodity -- practically indistinguishable from the larger social question. During the revolutionary events in May 1968, the SI demonstrated that it could act at large in a non-hierarchical manner and acted at all points to show the importance of the organizational question to those swept into self-activity.

The "Minimum Definition [of a Revolutionary Organization]" announced the bases of accord around which a revolutionary organization must gather. With the formation of sections, the question of the structure that would maintain this content in the relations of individuals and sections geographically separated came forward in discussion between the French and Italian sections. Out of it, Debord proposed what would be adopted at the 8th Conference [in Venice in July 1969] (substantially unchanged) as the "provisional statutes." We prefer to call them groundrules or -- in a Fourierist twist -- anti-statutes. The importance of this document cannot be exaggerated: the evolution from centralist to direct democratic practice is -- properly understood -- also the evolution from informal association to formal commitment, from occult deliberation to public development. [The groundrules], of course, needed tightening and expanding, and they would always be "provisional": we had several suggestions for their improvement which we drew from our experiences after the 8th Conference. It may be more than accidental that those who remain in the SI found it adequate to postpone further discussion around the "statutes" until their next conference, meaning a year or more.

## TO THE FORMATION OF A SECTION

From mid-1966, situationist texts found some small distribution here [in America]: "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy" [translated into English by Donald Nicholson-Smith] and the "Address to Algerian Workers" and, most importantly, Vaneigem's *The Totality for Kids*. The critical import of these works struck home in small groups which were then sifting through critical traditions in search for the method (the way of thinking) that had practically disappeared from the social landscape. There was an interest in who the situationists might be, and there was some activity of independent translation of SI texts.

In March 1967, Tony Verlaan -- who had been involved in the Strasbourg scandal, and who was to take the part of the SI against the Garnaultin ideologues -- arrived in New York. From his arrival, the practical engagement of the SI here can be marked. He brought with him a letter signed by Debord and Vaneigem in the name of the SI: "Comrade Verlaan has all our confidence and can make in our name any useful contacts during his stay in the United States."

Verlaan was then outside the SI (he would not become a member until January 1968), yet he was mandated: he could speak in the name of the organization, make on the scene judgments for it, officially enjoying all confidence -- an "all" including the critical confidence which membership implied. The imperatives of establishing direct contacts here may have been obvious, but the manner in which the relationship was established to this end continued the centralist line of development that the SI was also attempting to surpass: the manner in which he was mandated was implicitly hierarchical and non-transparent, and stood in contradiction to the direct democratic practice the SI was developing.

Verlaan immediately took his mandate to include the opening of an SI post office box [Box 491, Cooper Station], and although [the] situationists were not consulted, they greeted the action with approval when they learned of it.

Knowing that British situationists were preparing a translation of Khayati's Strasbourg brochure -- but

27



impatient with their progress -- Verlaan translated, rewrote and printed an edition of 10,000 [copies of] *On the Poverty of Student Life* in the name of the SI. This was also done without consulting [the] situationists anywhere along the line. The translation was bad, the rewriting to an American situation (of which he had only the first impressions) was somewhat off-center, and the printing was atrocious. The SI at first also acknowledged this [act by Verlaan] with approval. In *Internationale Situationniste* #11, the French section included the *On the Poverty* booklet in a photograph of the various editions of the Strasbourg text.

Verlaan's practical activity during his first six months in the US centered around *Black Mask*, which centered around Ben Morea. The first manifestation of *Black Mask*, [which was] the "closing" of the Museum of Modern Art in October 1966 had generated a certain interest. From afar [the] situationists saw in this act a possible revolutionary development. "But to what could be a clear beginning succeeds the show of opposition, centered around putting bodies in the street, street meetings, picket lines, going to the people, as the contemptuous saying goes" (*Robin Hood*). Those in the socialist perspective would have called *Black Mask* adventurist, but adventure as playful unfolding was completely missing. Verlaan's participation in *Black Mask* was public: demonstrations, the printing of a section of *On the Poverty* first in its bulletin, a signed article and immediately preceding his break with Morea, a signature on an atrocious anti-art manifesto.

Although during this period Verlaan never -- to our knowledge -- openly stated he was a situationist, his speech and activity in its name led some (perhaps most who came in touch with him) to assume he was. His defacto membership in *Black Mask* could then, organizationally, be viewed as entrism (particularly identified in *Ten Days* as the enemy). At any rate, more mundanely, it was natural to assume association between *Black Mask* and the SI. It was also natural -- given the existence of *Black Mask* in that gossip suburb of the mind called the "Left" -- that the impression of association would survive the termination of relationships [between Verlaan and *Black Mask*].

We had met Verlaan the night of his arrival in New York. Contact between the three of us [Chasse, Elwell and Verlaan] was at first limited, although there was in common a certain affinity for the SI (at least of its better known theories and of its critical method). By late summer 1967, when the three of us first talked at any length, an appreciation for the SI -- for its evolving apprehension of direct democratic practice on a coherent base -- was common.

From this point the attempt to form a coherent group -- to develop autonomous activity -- can be dated, although it was hardly articulated then. Personal relations between the three of us were not marked by strain, and although the different paths we had traveled to a common critical awareness still separated us (Verlaan remained with Morea, and with an activist outlook; Elwell remained a subculture anarchist [and Chasse remained a theoretician]), there was radical possibility in what we shared.

Verlaan took up printing activity in earnest in the early fall of 1967: editions of *Ten Days That Shook the University*, *The Totality for Kids*, "The Decline and Fall," etc. He broke with Morea over the latter's maneuvers to get [the] National SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] to support a "Zengakuren style" snake dance through the streets of Washington [DC] on October 15th [1967], the day which would see the Pentagon "confrontation." This break, in retrospect, is seen as essentially tactical; it was not the activist approach that Verlaan effectively rejected, but what, in his judgment, were its excesses.

We published -- under the name of the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life -- three of Chasse's texts on the ghetto insurrections of the previous summer (as *Hall of Mirrors* [1967]), appropriating an anarchist post office box to do so. There was talk of a collective booklet aimed at the so-called New Left.

\* \* \*

Raoul Vaneigem arrived in New York in mid-November [1967]. Discussion with him cleared up for us all the role of the SI in the Strasbourg scandal and in the exclusion of the Garnaultins which followed. During his short stay, he declined to meet with Morea, a little fact that would to have some significance. Verlaan attended an SDS regional conference in New Jersey, finding many people of interest there.



Chasse, Elwell and Vaneigem attended for an afternoon but found the bureaucratic stultification of the workshops to be an old story. It was clear to us that any people of interest in SDS could not be approached through their own apparatus. Murray Bookchin, anarcho-Bolshevik theoretician and former - associate of ours (from whom we had separated organizationally -- with the "formation" of the Council -- although personal contacts were still maintained) returned from Europe at that point. He and Vaneigem debated the organizational practices of the SI (discussion which ranged from Morea and militantism to the role of subjectivity and the character of negation). There was particular emphasis on a recent break between [the] situationists and a group of young anarchists. Elwell, who was then in correspondence with one of these anarchists, found the revelations concerning the irresponsible practice of this [anarchist] group disturbing, but felt the need to verify this in the correspondence, and so stated.

Vaneigem asked Chasse and Elwell if they wished to become situationists, and they stated they did not -- at least in the moment. (Elwell was not asked [directly]. It was thought then that he was not quite on the same grounds, an impression especially conveyed in discussion over the nature of the proletariat and its existence as the negation of class society. The matter was to be quickly clarified.) Late in 1967 we were on SI grounds. To make our adhesion to the SI meaningful, we saw the necessity for writing at least one important text that would at once reveal the appropriation of the critical method and place our text in the same line as those of the SI. The point was not to express an exercise in theoretical writings, but to express our capacity for applying the critical method to specific[ally] American conditions. Our adhesion then would be simply the recognition of what existed, and the expression of a mutual critical confidence, rather than the adhesion expressing the confidence of the SI in the possibility of our capacities, a one-way approval.

In the weeks that followed Vaneigem's departure, Bookchin attempted a broad anarchist alliance, a dismal failure; he also accused Verlaan of attempting to bureaucratically manipulate [the] SDS into withholding support from the Stop-The-Draft Week. Elwell put his break with Bookchin's Bolshevik practices in writing. We were acting and reacting as a group; unevenness -- retardation -- was disappearing in the daily practice of a radical combination.

Meanwhile, Morea wrote to the SI, asking why Vaneigem had taken the words of the "shitheads Verlaan and Chasse" and refused to see him. The answer, signed by members of the French section and newly formed British one, was relatively mild in dealing with Morea's militantism, stressing instead his relations with an obvious mystic (whom Vaneigem had met). The letter also announced that Chasse and Verlaan were situationists and would act as members of the SI everywhere [and in everything they] did. A copy of this letter was sent to Chasse and Verlaan along with a letter (to them), recognizing them as situationists and making certain organizational directives, including the destruction of [Verlaan's edition of] *On the Poverty* (along with certain other texts printed by Verlaan in the name of the SI), and the holding of all further breaks -- if at all possible -- until the arrival of a delegate from Europe. The implicit critical confidence extended by virtue of making them members was withdrawn -- or at least put in doubt -- in the request to hold further action pending the arrival of a situationist from elsewhere.

The SI was only around that time beginning -- internationally -- to work out direct democratic practice. Its basis would be that the critical confidence in a member was ipso facto confidence in his [sic] capacity for autonomous activity as a member, and that sections -- groupings of such individuals -- would also have that capacity. In contradiction to this evolving practice was, when in a clutch -- when something had to be decided -- the organization's centralist practice, which is also the "practice" of daily life. In this practice, it came quite naturally that those at the "center" should think it necessary to check our decisions (to choose for us the "tactical" moment of our adhesion, to ask us to hold decisions until the arrival of a delegate).

Our reactions were as one, if somewhat confused. In the replay (signed by the three of us) we already rejected this move to undercut our autonomy and generally criticized the character of the measures taken, but with this confusion: we simultaneously argued as if we were members and as if we were not. This confusion can be seen as rooted in an implicit apprehension of the necessities of international organization and in our hedges that the SI was that organization. Though arguing both sides of the question, we concluded our reply formally outside the SI, signing it as the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life. The SI had previously made its stand against entrism public; if it was aware of the confusion



created by these "contending memberships," it would not -- in reply to us -- take up the question directly (what struck the SI, rightly, was the unusualness of a non-member acting as a member; a situation it was at least partly responsible for by way of its mandate to Verlaan). Nine months later -- after Verlaan had become a situationist and at the point where we were planning a journal for the Council -- the SI stated that in view of our continued separate existence, Verlaan would have to choose one organization or the other, to avoid dual membership.

Parenthetically: in our reply, we agreed to the destruction of the texts, as requested, thus recognizing that these texts were in the name of the SI, and that they should have the say. Later, when we arrived to move Verlaan's belongings (he was then out of town) from an apartment he vacated, we discovered many boxes of *On the Poverty* and other texts, the destruction of which had been requested, so we simply carried out the SI's instructions. Verlaan was outraged on the discovery of this. His plans for destruction, it seems, consisted of a massive distribution on college campuses. (Many recognize the university as a key point of destruction of critical thought, but this recognition can come from different perspectives.) Before the destruction was requested -- before Vaneigem's arrival -- Verlaan himself had recognized the superiority of the British translation [by Christopher Gray] (published with introductory comment and postscript as *Ten Days That Shook the University*) and reprinted an edition of it. In early 1969, following the formation of the American section, it was agreed that Verlaan would undertake from California the reprinting of *Ten Days* and the Vaneigem booklet. It was decided that the new edition of *Ten Days* would have certain comics (which he had done prior to the formation of the section) as foldout from the back cover, and that a panel from the same would be on the front cover. The new edition arrived in New York with panels from various situationist comics scattered throughout and with the title of his translation substituted for *Ten Days*. His unilateral decisions to make these changes were never mentioned in the process. (It had been agreed that the title of Vaneigem's booklet would be changed from *The Totality for Kids* to *Fundamental Banalities*; the new edition arrived bearing the old title. Again, with no stated reasons, nor any notification.

All of this is a matter of small incidents (the likes of which the ongoing activity of an organization is made) and is merely noted here to illustrate the fact that Verlaan's practical relation[s] with the revolutionary organization did not appreciably change with his formal adhesion to it, and that, for reasons which seemed perfectly valid to him -- and which he felt confident he did not have to explain -- he never hesitated to discard previous common decisions, without explanations of his reasons, and without notification.

Bookchin entered the fray as partisan of the "ill-treated" Morea, citing the reasons given to Morea for Vaneigem's refusal to see him as other than those given in New York by us. The British section answered him (with a copy to Morea), saying that someone was obviously lying -- a safe assumption in [a] broader context, but implying that this someone could be Vaneigem, in whom their critical confidence, presumably, was assumed.

Their hedging was apparently rooted to their belief that Verlaan wasn't of SI caliber. (It became clear that its real roots were in their view of Morea's utility in an "advanced" Anglo-American sphere of activity, where both Vaneigem and Verlaan were nothing.)

Before the end of 1967, the three British situationists [TJ Clark, Donald-Nicholson Smith and Christopher Gary] had been excluded from the SI for their refusal to break definitely with Bookchin and Morea. They were excluded, as it were, for their willful maintenance of the organizational confusion in which the SI found itself. The subsequent actions of those excluded would be -- as had been the case with the Garnaultins -- confirmation of the necessities of the exclusions. In *IS* #12 (September 1969), the French section would make critical commentary on the affair of the British section, but it would not there -- or elsewhere -- publicly deal with the affair in its totality, as it related to the problem of centralization. The situation was apparently transcended with the exclusion of the British, who in the name of spheres of activity (!) had been the excessive force toward centralization. What matters in revolutionary organization is not simply the deletion of a problem (which can turn out to be a matter of suppressing an antagonism) but the conscious mastery of its own history. The American section, in *Situationist International* #1 (June 1969) made no reference to these matters at all.



Chris Gray, who was to have been the SI delegate, arrived in New York the day after his exclusion. Each of the three of us discussed the affair with him and drew our own conclusions. During the month Gray was in New York, Verlaan -- due to a crisis in his private life -- left for Europe, after distributing SI materials at an SDS National. In Paris, he reversed his previous common stand with us and became a member of the SI. (He would in recounting conversations in Paris stress that Chasse was a bit too formalist, a theme he would play in many variations in the next two years -- his becoming a member should have revealed to us the little matter that organizational questions were for him.) From Paris, he proceeded to London, staying with the ex-situationists there. He would, as a result, question the exclusion of the British; but the majority of the SI sharply rejected this and he dropped the matter. (His apprehension of organization, in many ways quite similar to that of the British, at that point, should have been accessible to the SI as a whole.) As for Gray, he would subsequently find a psychological critique a missing factor in the SI and would find such a critique in Norman O. Brown. [Gray] would eventually become -- as *King Mob Echo* -- British public relations front for that union of Morea and the mystic who had appalled Vaneigem: the Motherfuckers. An evolution with all the logic of dry rot.

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By February 1968, the Council was an organization of two [Chasse and Elwell], separated from the SI (itself then six people, including Verlaan and -- in Denmark -- Martin [the others being Debord, Vaneigem, Khayati and Rene Vignet]) over what for us were the unresolved questions of critical confidence and autonomy.

Verlaan, the American situationist, was traveling during the rest of the winter and spring, to the West Coast and Florida. Chasse, not a member, handled the affairs of the SI during this period, and there began a refrain in letter from Paris that would continue up until the 8th Conference in Venice: "Where is Tony? . . . Any news from Tony? . . . No news from Tony." During the many months between Verlaan's becoming a member and the point where Chasse joined, Chasse was always [the] mediator between the majority of the SI in Paris and Verlaan, "active in the field."

Chasse wrote *The Power of Negative Thinking. Or Robin Hood Rides Again* in this period, and he and Elwell published it in April [1968], under the name of the Council. Conceived as a necessarily common project -- as first expression of autonomous activity, first by Chasse and Verlaan, then by the three of us -- it was completed as a personal one with the incorporation of passing critical commentary by Elwell (and Verlaan when he was around).

Verlaan would -- from California -- request half the stock of *Robin Hood* for immediate distribution there. We refused, and our failure to send what he considered adequate numbers became a bone of contention. A year and a half later (November 1969), he would request -- from Amsterdam -- that we immediately send 100 copies each of *Ten Days*, *Totality*, *Robin Hood*, and the review of the section: "even if you must staple themselves yourselves!" (we would have had to), so that he could assume projects of his own that probably would have conflicted with our common projects (but this aspect, as ever, did not seem to have occurred to him: or if it did, [it] did not matter.

His "activity" during those months in California was to include soliciting reproduction of SI texts in the so-called underground press (and, in one case, writing original material -- as the SI -- directly for a commercial underground rag), and a continued infatuation with the sufferings of SDS. He would justify these and many other tactics in terms of getting the critique around. As his later ties around RAC would indicate, he never quite understood the denial of entrism as strategic, nor the flowing of tactics from strategy. Each tactic he used was, for him, subversive -- a *détournement* -- by virtue of his using it. In a moral outlook, it is the purity of motivation that counts.

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We greeted news of the revolutionary events in May 1968 in France with an enthusiasm that surpassed our reaction to the 1967 insurrections here. The proletariat had returned to the streets (its absence from them had been judged its absence from history). On request from SI comrades in Paris we translated and mimeographed the CMDO [Council for Maintaining the Occupations]. "Address to All Workers." With

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that was mailed out the "Minimum Definitions of a revolutionary Organization" and an original text, the story of which was to prove a variation on a theme. It was decided that the idiocies here around the May events should be countered with a short release of our own (the Council and the SI). We would each write out our thoughts and put together a collective piece. Chasse produced a piece tracing the general line of events (we had at that time little specific reportage from comrades, beyond the occupation of the Sorbonne); by the agreed time, neither Elwell nor Verlaan had produced anything. It was at that point decided that anything to be published should contain more details. Verlaan proceeded to collage sections of Chasse's piece into a literal translation he had made of a letter from Paris in mid-May, spiced with not a few randomly placed expletives -- the whole generally unreadable and certainly not useful in clarifying ground. We gave up. Chasse said Verlaan could use his material, but the piece as it stood should not be published with the Council signature. Verlaan mimeographed and mailed his collage, signed by the SI and the Council.

During the previous months, in spite of formal organizational separation and repeated geographic and (assumed) tactical differences, the attempt at a working group of three was at least maintained. During the RAC affair to follow, this too would for a while disappear.

The student occupation of Columbia University [New York City] in the Spring of 1968 would come to have a key position in the mythological scenario of spectacular opposition here (that opposition which in its awareness and supporting ideology expresses the devolution of Leninism): out of the occupation of the "least political" building (Feyerweather) came certain individuals who would form the Teachers College Strike Committee, which in turn would evolve into the Radical Action Cooperative (RAC). In contrast to the other ideological groupings drawing the "lessons" of Columbia, RAC had a twist: its active members were not SDS heavies, that is, politicos, well versed in the patterns of mystification. They discovered, from the occupation, daily life at the center of a possible radical separation from those ideologues and from ideology altogether. The possibility for them -- and through them -- would not emerge.

Verlaan was to engage certain members of RAC in discussion. Within a few weeks -- due to these and subsequent discussions, and a shift in his private life -- he was living in a RAC communal apartment, participating in that organization on a round-the-clock basis. He would maintain, on the few occasions we saw him and the matter [was] discussed, that he maintained an organizational separation from RAC, that he had not entertained a dual allegiance. This verbal insistence crumbled in the face of his daily participation in their communal existence which was their organizational existence: it was this participation -- not his words to the contrary -- that would naturally lead anyone, and first of all the members of RAC, to assume he was a member of that organization and answerable to it.

Verlaan's fascination with the communal -- and the debilitating effect this would have on his activity as a situationist -- did not begin with RAC and it would not end there. Horelick would write to us (November 5, 1969) that he was surprised that "Tony has still some special (I think displaced) enthusiasm for the communal." (Our objection, of course, is not to the communal as the survival form an individual may choose, rather it is to the illusions and pretensions that tend to flow from it.)

The form of this new separation between Verlaan and us was not itself new; it was simply the highest expression of a tendency that had previously expressed itself in his earlier relations with *Black Mask* and SDS. His disengagement from one was soon enough the engagement with the next. Each succeeding "field of agitation" was his withdrawal in [the] face of the common projects which our understanding implied. Each time, he separated those with whom he was in theoretical accord from those others with whom -- on another basis -- he was practically engaged. (In the Fall of 1969, this practice was again returning. In a letter to Horelick, [Verlaan] says, "As for *our* immediate activities in Holland" and then goes on to talk of immediate activities that lead him to work his "ass off," as he says, and, we add, despite his "our," on anything except that which had been commonly undertaken.) Altogether this was his particular refusal of organizational responsibility and was the expression of a retarded view of "practice" as something other than the practice of theory."

RAC was founded on a contradictory base: its communitarianism, with its inherent reproduction of mystifications, and its reach toward a critique of daily life. The realization of the latter was impossible



without overcoming the former, and the weight of conditions (which are first of [all] daily life) made this impossible. RAC was made of those produced by university life, and they brought with them the entire catalogue of stupidities and insensibilities denounced by Khayati in the Strasbourg text (*Ten Days*).

RAC was at root mere reflection -- without the critical element that could have made it other [than that] -- of the disintegration of bourgeois values as they manifest themselves in family, individuality, private property. Its relationship to critical thought was always -- practically -- one of infatuation. Their separation from university life was [a] sham: even as they would formally put the question of reform of Teachers College, they daily recreated the ruling features of university life, "reformed" and in further decay.

In this environment it was only natural that Verlaan would assume -- whether he desired to or not -- the role of specialist of criticism: the critical distance between them and him would become yet another hierarchy in the name of democratic dialogue. It was determined that they would eventually revolt against him, and in so doing, revolt against the ideas he seemed to advance, [i.e.,] the theories of the SI. And it is further only natural that the revolt would be led by those whom he found "most advanced" within: in particular, King Collins. The appalling passivity of the whole business is underlined by the fact that this revolt would only follow Verlaan's separation from them.

Verlaan -- though it is a minor note -- gravitated to the only milieu he had experienced as radical: the student one. His desire to create "another Strasbourg" (where a student commune -- of which he was a part -- had its role) undoubtedly also caused him to gravitate toward the communal.

His defacto membership in RAC left the SI in ideological waters here. This was unknown to the rest of the SI in Europe, thanks to [Verlaan's] habit of never communicating anything to them. It stood in marked contrast to the positive turn the French section had taken during -- and after -- the revolutionary events in May [1968]. Our relationship to the SI had been one of agreement, short of the negative implications of centralist practice. In view of our possible adhesion, we did not wish to see the SI here be absorbed by the general spectacle of opposition. The tangle of events was such that even before being able to press to a conclusion our relations to the SI -- to be a part or separate from it -- it was necessary to intervene over RAC, to clarify the ground. Chasse, on the conviction that relations with Verlaan had reached an impasse, wrote to Vaneigem concerning RAC and Verlaan. The matter found its organizational resolution in Verlaan's formal separation from RAC. Chasse's letter had in effect forced [Verlaan's] hand. Over six months after his separation from RAC -- after months of inactivity on the West Coast -- [Verlaan] would bring up Chasse's "ill-treatment" of him around the RAC affair; it was rehashed and again resolved. In September 1969, when we met in Paris, he would again bring it up, maintaining that it had for him remained unresolved -- that he had only tired of talking of it and had thus allowed apparent resolution! We need only say here that we thought then, and with each subsequent "resolution," that Verlaan had recognized his error. It was not that. He was to show, over a year later that -- in his reversal of [situationist] history and in his moralist outlook -- he was on [RAC's] level. Were it not for a certain "looseness" that prevailed in our relations (as the negative side of trust), we could have known this before.

A formal separation is public; it acknowledges that a pre-existing relation has become entanglement, and dates its termination. This particular separation implied a change of residence; depressed by the thought of apartment-hunting in New York City, Verlaan left for California. It was an action that would be one more block to the immediate rediscovery of common ground [between us]. And, as with Morea, the relations with RAC would have us scraping our feet for some time to come. The break between RAC and Verlaan had, in practice, its ugly moment; a break with the family is rarely clean. Verlaan, in his letter of separation, maintained the option of continued contacts with individuals in RAC (and would exercise this option to the point of staying at the RAC commune for the first few days of his next stay in the East), and this would lead to continuing confusion. Later, as we were planning *SI* #1, and dividing the tasks, Verlaan assumed responsibility for an analysis of the whole Columbia scene and of RAC in particular. He done nothing on this (had he, it would have probably revealed real differences between us at that point), and we did not pick up the task. A public presentation of the involvement and its termination would have defused a tactic Collins would employ in his eventual revolt [against Verlaan].



RAC effectively dissolved somewhere along the line, although as late as September 1969, there were still some using its name for their ideological enterprises. Having exhausted its poor possibilities in New York, the entire show migrated to Cambridge [Massachusetts] in late winter 1969, where Collins would gain some notoriety for his part in Harvard [University] disruptions. His infatuation with what was superior to him continued, as did our rebuffs. Finally, his thick hide was penetrated and his ideological forces regrouped: he, as the Council for Conscious Existence, launched his belated revolt. With the Council, Collins and his accomplices have extended his previous caricature of situationist theory into that of SI organizational practices.

## THE AMERICAN SECTION TO THE 8TH CONFERENCE

The texts we prepared and distributed in the early fall ('68) brought with them that mutual recognition -- or critical confidence -- which had been projected as the necessary base for organization. We began to talk seriously of, and eventually to plan, a journal for the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life. To conceive of it, we had already to be thinking seriously of continuation, of follow through, of a project. (What became *Robin Hood* had been likewise conceived, but not so clearly, and in finished form it was an individual projection. The magazine project can be seen as a concretization, a putting into practice of the projections made therein.)

To begin functioning as a revolutionary organization was to grapple again with the organizational question. What would be our relationship to those, elsewhere, who discovered in our work something common to them? More immediately, what was our relationship to the SI? Was the separation between us real? or had the SI's development surpassed our objections?

We knew that the international[ization] of capitalism demanded the international organization of its coherent opposition. The SI, in revolutionary May [1968] and, less importantly, in correspondence between Debord and Chasse, had sufficiently committed itself to direct democratic practice to make unlikely the ascendancy of centralist practices in the future. That this tendency would return decisively a year later -- and that its return would be protested by us alone -- could not then have been predicted. Such a return was of course possible, as was the attempt of any tendency fundamentally of the old world to achieve dominance, given the opening; but we found the SI actively engaged against such directions.

On the level of working relations, Verlaan was the only SI member in the US. His relationship with RAC had been an impediment to our relation[ship] to the SI (and to him as a member). But he had corrected himself by marking his separation from RAC. During his stay with RAC, personal relations with Elwell had all but come to an end, but he had agreed with Chasse that, were his criticisms of Elwell to prove true, they would do so for everyone concerned, in practice.

In view of all this, Chasse wrote to Paris on October 23 [1969], declaring his adhesion to the SI, if the projects previously planned (the magazine) were acceptable as SI projects and if Council texts could be distributed in the name of the SI. He announced Elwell's accord with procedure, stating that resolution of the Elwell/Verlaan differences would be necessary for collaboration. [Chasse] notified Verlaan (then on the West Coast) of all this and of the positive response from Paris. There would be from Verlaan no immediate response.

The conditions were accepted from by the SI with the proviso that, if Verlaan did not then accept Elwell as a member, another third [fourth?] person on whom Chasse and Verlaan agreed should be found as quickly as possible. This, so that a working majority could at all time exist. While open to mechanistic interpretation, this provision was practically sound. We had found in our experience as the Council (and were to find again during Verlaan's absence and effective nonparticipation in the section during the winter and much of the spring, and yet again after our return from the Venice Conference and, of course, now, outside the SI) that two people make effective functioning extremely difficult, and not simply on the nonexistence of a numerical majority. Two is the smallest possible group in qualitative as well as quantitative terms; all tendencies are magnified.

Elwell had in preparation at the time of Chasse's joining the SI a rather long cartoon, "Address to New York City Public School Students." The trade union strike which we had spoke to in our September



[1968] leaflet was still unsettled, and many exemplary things were happening in the chaos that so unnerved all the bureaucrats. Chasse thought that this cartoon should appear as an SI text and informed Verlaan of same. There was no immediate response; the cartoon appeared under the name of the SI. And the working relations between us continued in [the] planning of the magazine.

Verlaan returned in late November and, in meeting with Chasse, agreed to Elwell's membership. The school cartoon existed as "proof" that Elwell was capable of activity, that Verlaan's previous criticisms -- as far as working, organizational relations went -- were invalidated. It must be noted, too, that there was no common -- open -- resolution of the personal relations between Elwell and Verlaan; there was instead an implicit understanding of the limits of these relations. Our coming together was in recognition of the need of formal -- that is, organizational -- ties. This sort of formality is the practice of transparency -- it is the knowledge that an organization to be revolutionary must be a *public body*. None of us at the time saw the necessity of a formal, common statement on the formation of the section, stating what previously divided us, the resolution of these separations, and the tasks which we set out for the section. Such a statement would have forced a common apprehension of our historical relations (giving us a clean sheet) and would have made this apprehension and the commitments we drew from it a matter of public record.

The SI and Council mailing lists were consolidated. A statement was prepared on the dissolution of the Council, and on the projected first issue of *Situationist International*. This was mailed out with the last three Council texts (the school strike leaflet, a piece on Bookchin's theories concerning the revolutionary events in May and a piece addressed to RAC and Columbia SDS) and Verlaan's cartoons (done while he was still in RAC) on the "international student conference" in New York in September [1969]. A draft statement that Chasse was preparing on [Herbert] Marcuse, for the magazine, was mimeographed, and we leafleted a *Guardian* benefit that he -- among others "stars" -- was addressing. We laid concrete plans for SI #1, including a preliminary division of tasks and work schedule. This was important because the magazine was the projected basis of our sustained activity in the months to follow. Verlaan was leaving again immediately for the West Coast (he had settled there) and any projects in which the three of us would engage would necessarily take a written form during the separation. He had in the past expressed dissatisfaction with journals on the format of the review of the French section, preferring broadsheets and other more easily reproducible forms. But the division of tasks was assumed voluntarily. All this was accomplished in the few weeks that Verlaan spent in the East, and was no mean achievement. It was practical evidence that previous retardations and separations were in the process of being surpassed.

Here as elsewhere, it happens that the greatest step forward is followed by a slow, steady retreat: the common activity of the American section halted just as it was beginning. Verlaan's departure for the Bay Area reintroduced a separation which would prove other than geographic. On his part, there was silence. He sent no letters -- but this had been anticipated, and with his distaste for epistolary communication in mind, we agreed to stay in close telephone communication. (In a letter to Horelick dated November 11, 1969, Verlaan quotes from a letter he wrote to Chasse during this period; he had a copy to quote from perhaps because the letter was never received [by Chasse].) The phone calls -- there were several -- were all placed by one of us. Chasse also wrote letters, follow-ups on phone conversations, letters as far from ultimatums in style and content as can be imagined. Finally, Chasse asked Verlaan if he wanted to be a part of the magazine. None of his promised writing had been produced, nor was it ever to be produced. An answer to Chasse's simple question would not come until Verlaan's eventual return to New York, and then it was again, yes -- with hedges to be seen.

[Verlaan's] activity in those four months on the West Coast consisted of the completion of one task he had undertaken: the reprinting of *Totality* and *Ten Days*, mentioned earlier. While his effective withdrawal from the autonomous activity of the section was initial and outstanding in this period, it was not singular. Elwell was overcome with a paralysis in [the] face of his assumed tasks concerning the magazine. Those pieces that had been promised which were eventually to be produced came tortuously and late; certain pieces were abandoned. In January [1969], Elwell produced the "Post Mortem Ante Facto" wall poster; this was however individual production and a surrogate for participation.

Chasse produced what he had promised and more. He fell into the role of goad to the others during the dreary months to follow. Old individual patters, old separations were effectively reintroduced, and,



coming as they did in light of what was commonly assumed, had a new negative significance. Verlaan found himself, by his own decision, in the gelatinous sea of Bay Area "oppositions," and was -- quite naturally -- alienated from it and resultingly sorely depressed. (That he would later maintain other factors -- factors from relations with us preceding the formation of the section and unexpressed at its formation -- at the root of his depression remains his problem, a profoundly ideological one.) With the practice of the section at the level of daily life reduced to two [people], Elwell re-found the manner of his relationship to the production of *Robin Hood*: that of editorial critic of the work of another. The general conditions of daily life which press toward an effective despair were known. But analyzing a failing, while a condition for its correction, can also be a part of its prolongation. Practically grasping the unity of decision and execution was an arduous process.

Verlaan returned East -- in late Spring [1969] -- due to a crisis in his private life. The encounter over Chasse's letter to Vaneigem concerning Verlaan's activity with RAC -- leading to the second formal resolution between them on this question -- is dealt with [above]. Verlaan expressed the feeling that he could now write, but continued -- on the side -- to find other forms of activity or at least other forms of presentation of greater promise. Despite a somewhat disquieting atmosphere, things looked up: Elwell was writing, and Jon Horelick was clearly with us, if not yet formally.

Verlaan had met Horelick a year and a half previously in SDS; they had subsequently become friends. Horelick's critical evolution was steady and in the fall of 1968 he produced an attack on SDS idiocies that was excellent. At the time of the formation of the section, Verlaan mentioned that his friend might soon be with us; from that point our direct contact with Horelick began. Soon after Verlaan's return in the spring, he and Elwell would affirm that Horelick was on SI positions, had their critical confidence. Horelick would produce the statement on Baran and Sweezy that appears in *SI* #1. He was not formally asked if he considered himself a situationist until the night of Verlaan's departure for Europe in May [1969].

Verlaan attempted work while here, on two pieces: a "Who's Who of the Ministars of the Minispectacle," and a signed piece on the New Left. He left for Europe -- all of a sudden -- with these pieces incomplete; the "Who's Who" was completed by the three of us who remained. The four pages of the other piece were judged by all of us to be incomprehensible -- even unintelligible -- and was not published. In September [1969], when he would first see the published issue, he would express dismay to comrades of the French section that his "article" was not included. That he would have remembered his "article" as being [in] anything close to publishable form speaks much on how he remembers and *how he thinks*.

Anyway, his incompleted work for the magazine proved inconsequential compared to what had been -- unknown to us -- his work against it. Later, on the night of Verlaan's departure, Horelick recounted his hesitations about the SI, about us. It seems Verlaan had, despite declarations to the contrary, resulting from the second formal resolution over RAC, not "refound" critical confidence in us, that he was still pissed over incidents as far back as the destruction of *On the Poverty* and that he resultingly had conveyed to Horelick a different picture of the history of the section and of our relations, a "history" replete with manipulations of him and his projects. We remained in his view theoreticians with serious practical limits that Horelick should be aware of in [the] face of future work with us, and alternately wanted Horelick to join and not to join, as he (Verlaan) alternately found himself capable or incapable of assuming his responsibilities. The old ambivalence had been found sabotaging our common activity.

We found this intolerable and determined that, should Verlaan show up for the 8th Conference -- none of us were certain of this --, this hesitant confidence would have its definitive resolution. Through the summer, it was not clear whether Verlaan even considered himself a situationist. Following a postcard each to Chasse and Elwell during a brief visit with French comrades on his arrival in Europe, no situationist was to hear a word from him until early September, when it was the French section that initiated a search for him to inform him of the date and place of the Conference.

The magazine was finished and sent off to the printer without the participation of Verlaan. It was not the magazine initially planned 9 months previously, and in as much as the history of its making was the history of the section's attempt at autonomous activity, it was not the magazine it might have been.



Many pieces which would have enlarged its scope were simply abandoned en route, and in the end (as an economy measure), the numerous illustrations we had chosen had to be omitted. Chasse had done the great majority of the work, including the shitwork of negotiating with the printer, etc. Given to the printer in mid-June with the agreement for delivery by the end of the month -- and with instructions he failed to follow and we failed to check on (assuming a competence he did not have) -- it was finally delivered in early August. It was a sorry sight. Every possible error that could have been made in its technical production was made. It was as if it each tortuous turn in the section's development found its expression in a printer's error.

The three of us had scattered for the summer, as had been our previous plans. There was correspondence (on the magazine, the proposed statutes and the Conference), and some discussions of two gathered at a time -- of these matters and of problems of personal relations. These last easily come to the fore whenever working relations -- for whatever reasons -- have slackened.

We regrouped in New York before leaving for Europe, dealing with the printer at that time, and laying plans for distribution of the magazine. As had been the case with Elwell and Verlaan at the formation of the section, the limits of present personal relationships between the three of us were implicitly understood, and this time with some discussion as background.

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We three arrived in Paris in late September [1969], as did Verlaan. The four of us met to discuss what separated us and to find if it would be possible to ever again work together. Discussion opened around what Horelick had reported to us in the spring. This moved -- and somewhat to our surprise -- to yet another discussion of the involvement with RAC, or, more particularly -- and as the previous resolution over this matter had been -- of Chasse's initial letter to Vaneigem and its practical implications. After much heated discussion, it was agreed by all that it would have been better had Chasse -- at the point of sending the letter -- made one last attempt to contact the SI member (Verlaan) whose practice it concerned. If, when history repeats itself a second time as farce, it should be noted that this was already the third resolution of a simple matter which had at that point been close to a year past. The four of us seemed satisfied with this "final" resolution on the matter. But it must be noted that the discussion of the practical problems of the past was largely displaced into this and a re-hash of previous points of irritation Verlaan had felt toward Chasse's conduct. Verlaan's complete failure to participate in the section (which we had determined to definitively resolve), his absolute lack of communication with any situationist during the summer, the problems of the Elwell/Verlaan relationship -- none of these were directly dealt with, thus making way for Verlaan's complete inversion of the history of the section (and of the resolutions taken in Paris) when we next irritated him, with our ultimatum.

We were to discover that this meeting had, for him, established us as guilty of what, to him, is one of the gravest errors -- crime? -- of all: questioning him. That, he would write to us, made us incoherent and "intransparent." The revolutionary movement cannot preserve us from imbeciles.

It was decided -- on the basis of the critical confidence refound in our resolutions -- that a section could be re-formed at four, even with the geographic separation. Horelick and Verlaan would travel and work together in Europe for a time -- and Horelick not having an antipathy to writing letters -- keeping in close written communication with us. (And again with Verlaan in mind -- though wider application was possible -- we decided that we could exchange taped recordings.) Horelick would make much of this "agreement to write" as an end in itself: even calling it one of the few unanimous decisions we took. We mention here the others. After effectively re-forming the section, it was agreed that the only activity in which the four of us could commonly engage for the duration was literary in nature, all else being simply precluded by the geographic separation. And there was a resolution on other forms of practice, wherein we agreed that there could naturally be no opposition to other forms, which -- once presented -- could be adopted by and carried through by the whole of the section, or, if that was not desirable, and there were no principled objections, by any part of the section. Naturally, new projects could not interfere or prevent those over which there had already been agreement. In such cases, the decision to drop -- or rearrange -- projects would have to be arrived at in common.

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We also expressed our approval of the general content of notes Chasse had prepared for the Conference on the question of organization, in which, among other things, is stated: "Participation and rotation of tasks are assumed by the mere act of becoming a member. This requires that any member who is not now prepared to go on this minimum basis must immediately resign from the organization, on his own hook, for his own good (not to speak of the good of the rest of us). . . . This minimum, it seems to me, must be absolutely unquestionable for *any* concerted action. Barring that, it is hopeless to get together."

Finally, we agreed -- a change from our "informal" past practice -- that future meetings of the section should be closed to non-members, to avoid confusion over membership. If only through this simple resolution, it is clear that we all sensed the need to establish relations on a more formal basis, but we did not generalize this need.

The SI as a whole was then in evolution from an "informal" to a "formal" organization. Debord's propositions for SI "statutes" clearly point to this, reflecting the evolution that each section was itself experiencing: slowly and unevenly there was coming to everyone the realization that to be effective, the revolutionary organization must make its resolutions and commitments formally before the ensemble -- and given our specific geographic separation, this meant in writing. This movement, viewed from another angle, is the evolution into public development. Unfortunately, the slowness of this realization and the unevenness with which it came to all would prove disastrous.

That the four of us constituted ourselves anew as the American section hardly have been assumed by [the] other situationists -- or by others in general -- on the basis of announced individual intentions of location: Horelick intended to be in Europe up to one year; Verlaan, while stating intentions of eventual return, was even less specific; and the two of us, as half the section, were returning immediately here [to New York].

It should be said that Horelick spoke neither Danish, nor French nor Italian, and this would naturally have militated against his effective participation in a European section; the same cannot be said for Verlaan [who was Dutch and was fluent in French]. To clarify these factors, and on the basis of our intentions, a formal written statement concerning the reconstitution of the section as four, was, in retrospect, absolutely necessary.

A statement of resolution taken, enabling the four of us to continue in common activity, would have entailed an exposition of the negative developments resolved: the real history of the section -- which was nothing other than the history of the individuals involved and of their attempts at common coherent activity -- would have been rendered transparent for the ensemble. This would have entailed naming names, and characterizing real activity in such a way that it would have either driven resolutions deeper or exposed them then and there as resolutions *only* formal [in nature], without content. The failure to demand that this be done -- and the American section was clearly not alone in [the] face of this necessity and the failure to respond to it -- was an error which made possible the "surprise" at our part in the events of the following months.

## THE 8TH CONFERENCE

The sections that came together in Venice [Italy] in late September 1969 were not quite a year old. The 8th Conference -- as exchange of detailed information and general advancement of the situationist project -- was a flop. It had not been prepared. What was valuable was the opportunity to meet each other personally (up to then most of us knew each other through letters) and to find ourselves -- despite different languages and the nexus of our individual experiences -- on common grounds. That was exhilarating.

But everything changed in the formal sessions of the Conference. Rather than begin from a position of trust, it was as though all began from a position of doubt. Yet each time the doubt found open expression, it was only a prelude to our making our way back laboriously to discovering ourselves on the same theoretical and practical grounds. Obviously no one individual (or even several) could be held responsible for a general unease, or for its debilitating effects. We spent the better part of two sessions hashing out principled objections and so on, on the seeming collaboration of [J.V.] Martin (of the



Scandinavian section) with syndicalists: only to discover that it was all a misunderstanding over a detail. Similar time was spent discussing the established fact of [Mustapha] Khayati's resignation. On the other hand, ten or fifteen minutes perhaps were spent in session over the discussion and adoption of the "provisional statutes."

What particularly concerns us here is the way the sections presented -- or did not present -- matters relating to their internal functioning, bearing upon the real conditions of their existence.

The Scandinavian and Italian sections presented nothing of their internal functioning (a discussion over the latter was started, but became focused on [Gianfranco] Sanguinetti and the conditions of his life [he drove a Ferrari]). The American section presented a review of its past in such general -- and therefore, under the circumstances, vague -- terms that it equaled presenting nothing. The French section, to the degree that it presented problems, presented them as resolved. As the period before and after the Conference shows, the sections were not unaware -- for themselves -- of various internal retardations: they merely did not convey to each other an awareness of them at the Conference. These retardations -- all bearing naturally on the uncertainty of workability -- were not openly recognized as such, but found expression in the endless and, at the time, seemingly pointless doubt that could not find its object.

The sections surprised one another after the Conference by taking steps against old problems. The American and Italian sections did not except the French exclusion of Chevalier; we did not expect the positional and critical report of the Italian section (which accused itself -- in general terms -- of practically every possible mistake); we did not expect the reduction of the Scandinavian section from two (and a probable four) to, really, one; and events have shown that, perhaps least of all was expected the ultimatum in the American section. The reactions to the ultimatum produced almost immediate lack of trust -- if not open suspicion and distrust -- and the unfounded and unverified assumption that our actions were either meaningless or trite, attributing to us the most varied and fantastic -- if not phantasmagorical -- motives.

The question here of course is not that of foreseeing one or another event: but that of possessing an acute awareness which could only have been imparted by the sections, dealing transparently with each other.

Vaneigem has written that "from the first principles to their realization, there is the history of groups and individuals, which is also the history of their possible retardations. Only transparency in real participation stops the menace that weighs on coherence: the transformation of retardations into separation. Everything which still separates us from the realization of the situationist project holds to the hostility of the old world we live in, but the awareness of these separations already contains what will resolve them.

"Consequently, it is exactly in the struggle against separations that retardation appears in varying degrees; it is there that the non-awareness of the retardation obscures the awareness of separations, introduces incoherence. . . ."

## THE FALL CRISIS

We decided to be an American section of four, and to attempt to make it work despite the large geographic separation. This was quite a different problem from having one or members of a section absent from its affairs for a time, due to physical separation from its terrain. We must say now that although the arrangement seemed to be able to work, hypothetically, the loss of immediacy and personal contacts -- and not merely the history of the section -- militated against its working.

Along with writing, it was a prerequisite for maintaining a section that, as long as [Verlaan and Horelick] were both separated from the terrain of the section, they generally remain together, that is, in the same city or area. Otherwise, New York would become by default a central clearing house, with the time of decision and execution unworkably drawn out. (Horelick and Verlaan were to end up in separate countries [in Europe].)

Writing was the only means of conducting our affairs. It presupposed the simple necessity of having



addresses where we could reach each other. At this preliminary level, Horelick furnished us an address over two weeks after we requested it of him; Verlaan furnished one over three weeks after the same request.

Participation involves at least the sharing and rotating of tasks, the taking of initiatives on common projects and responding to that of others. The distance prevented them from sharing -- or have rotated to them -- the tasks of the day-to-day affairs of the section. But it could be assumed -- as it had been -- that it prevented neither their initiative nor their response over those common projects that took this distance into account.

The projects we agreed to were 1) the preparation of the second issue of the review; 2) a work on workers councils (which might have been part of the review -- we were divided on this point); 3) in addition, prior approval at the Conference for a delegates meeting in January [1970], involved preparation for it.

The time since our departure from Europe -- October 15th -- was only a matter of weeks. We had on other occasions waited for months for real participation. This time, our decision to overcome certain retardations in the past of the section required, to make the decision effective, to make participation real, that all of us adopt and maintain a certain rigor. (Parenthetically, this matter of rigor is not something we then -- or have since -- dreamed up. One of the positive developments of the Conference itself was that this necessity made itself felt by everyone: its first general expression would be the delegates meeting, scheduled a brief three months from the Conference.)

On the 7th of November -- having only by then received about a week before a note from Horelick that served to reassure us no harm had befallen them -- we concluded we could no longer assume the section was functioning. We didn't even know exactly where [Horelick and Verlaan] were. The alternatives closed to us were any that would reintroduce the former style of pleading with another to do what had been agreed upon. (Two days later, the 9th, in Milan, Horelick made the decision to return: at least partially we think on the grounds that he realized the existing conditions -- we here, he in Italy, and Verlaan no one quite sure where -- were unworkable.)

But on the 7th we were in the dark. We took the course of telling them how matters stood with us, and what conclusions we drew. We decided to send an ultimatum. The action would demonstrate the seriousness and the urgency attached to participation, and the necessity to settle the issue in a given time. We noted the main resolution (to be a section) from the Paris meeting. Then, that contacts necessary to this end were not maintained by them. And finally, if we could hardly demand that they initiate anything, we could and did demand that they respond to the initiatives we had taken.

The matter was to find itself almost immediately clarified and made more complicated.

On the 8th -- the next day -- we received a crucial letter from Horelick (plus two notes from Verlaan, with which we will deal later). The contents of Horelick's letter led us to decided not to retract the ultimatum we had just sent the day before, *but to reaffirm it*.

He wrote: "Tony and I need to coordinate our activity much better. We have intended to draw-up a criticism on the Chevalier exclusion within the framework of a general criticism of the Conference and the sections. This intention has been long standing. We have not completed still a simple task, and our research went on at the institute more separately than intelligently divided. Constant travel and petty conflict overflowed, I think, into our real practical activity. Rather than creating the usual inertia, unusual tense activity developed, thus the activity became a little painful. We have worked better separately so far, and it surprises me that Tony still has some special (I think displaced) enthusiasm for the communal. To prevent the destruction of our real activity, I think we will have to 'delimit' our daily relations. Otherwise I, for one, find myself in a position where I could despise a comrade *violently*! It is good for us all (here I mean) that he will be elsewhere, temporarily. We have gone through a typical automobile crisis to add to the general displeasure. It was equally enervating to discover strangers more pleasant than a friend. With the necessary adjustments on our daily relations, we can immediately sharpen our critical association.



"Guy suggested our making a criticism of the French section on the Chevalier exclusion, and of the sections in general since he is of the opinion that criticism was concealed at the Conference."

Later, on their relationship during this period, Verlaan wrote to Horelick: "Your 'sensitivity' to 'insults and bad jokes' make the 'insults' exist as *insults*. As I tried to get across to you, for me they don't have any *truth* as insults. Where I admit my unhandiness [authors' note: this word and another following it are unclear in the handwritten text], lack of positivity and of immediacy to be *my problem*, the maliciousness, the bad jokes, I hold to be clearly *your problem*. To an equal degree, as *my sensitivity* to you dealing with me as a *sucker* is *my problem*." The sophistry of most of Verlaan's verbiage aside, the situation they refer to didn't seem too pleasant.

Old problems had visibly come to [the] surface again (actually taking place a few days after our departure [from Europe], so that, in a sense, our meeting in Paris and the Conference, as well as Verlaan's absence during the entire summer, had been mere interruptions): his 'difficult' style with some comrades, his effective nonparticipation, his junking of his commitments (his own notes, as will be seen, reflect this), his critique of the SI that almost invariably found a parallel in the "crises" in his life.

On the other hand, [Horelick and Verlaan] they agreed to be half a section, functioning from over there. And if there were to be separations, it could definitely not be over unworkability: that would *mean* a parting of ways. We made the poor decision of dealing with them together, as half the section, rather than simply take note that the half section had itself split in half. In any case, the necessity lay in their drawing the conclusions, for it was, in the immediacy of the day-to-day, difficulties for them. The French section was later to accuse us of constituting a tribunal for dealing with a problem brought to our attention, elements of which were very familiar to us; elements against which the section had been effectively reformed.

So we reaffirmed our ultimatum. Three majors areas of our letter -- of the 8th -- were questioned : 1) the basis for our majority position; 2) the modification of the ultimatum, and 3) the "secret" tendency in Verlaan's critique of the SI.

On the first question, we said we affirmed the majority position "since what is in question is your failure to have carried the unanimous decision of the section. If, in drawing what to us are the conclusions from this, you believe we over-reach the basis from which we claim a majority position, we would naturally place the whole matter before the ensemble of the SI."

The point here is not whether we had a majority position, but whether it would be debated that we were over-reaching it. We thought this would be clear at least to two of the members of the American section. Horelick never mentioned it, and Verlaan -- characteristically -- wiped his ass with it. Sanguinetti -- on the basis of information he did not convey -- simply denied that there was any basis for our action. And the French section reduced the matter to the claim of their own invention that we constituted ourselves a majority by virtue of being the only two at a meeting. We will return to these things.

[Verlaan and Horelick] failed to carry their half over common projects. That, simply, was our majority position. We thought it followed from this -- but that Horelick and Verlaan might dispute it -- that if they were incapable of working together and if, in addition, the old story of Verlaan's critique of the SI was creating on the spot an atmosphere of suspicion with a member of the French section, it was necessary not only to demand immediate clarification of their incapacity to work together and with us, but to clear immediately the grounds on which suspicion among members might be nurtured. This was the "modification" of the ultimatum: not changed from what it was not, it was just made clearer, more precise, on the basis of new information that had been furnished us.

Finally, we did not say that Verlaan (or Horelick with him, but it is significant that they thought so) constituted a secret tendency. We said that, "Any tendency that remains unclarified before the ensemble is defacto secret." What we were asking [for] was the clarification. One of the statements immediately preceding this suggested that the critique might be accepted by the whole section. They did not say why we were not also part of the "secret" tendency they felt themselves in.

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Much of this of course was a considerable joke in itself. Horelick was correcting his views of Verlaan, on the 10th and 13th, by "reassuring" us that in the time they spent at the institute, despite the unusual tense activity and the incapability of completing a simple task, Verlaan was working diligently, very hard and effectively. As for any suspicion Debord may have had, Horelick was also correcting that a little by saying he had "badly expressed" himself before and that "Guy invited us." By the time the matter reached Verlaan's way of expressing it, it came out that Debord made the comradely suggestion that they contribute to a general critique since such criticism would be advantageous.

In view of the information we had at the time -- neither unworkability nor suspicion could be endured -- we sent our letter. And in view of the seriousness with which we viewed these developments -- we wrote in the second paragraph of that letter, that we would only deal with questions, for the time being, related to the ultimatum.

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Despite this, Horelick was to come up with criticism of us based on our "failure" to come through on materials we had promised prior to the ultimatum, as well as (although this is not too clear from his letters), our "failure" not to have answered his letters. We had, as soon as we received them. His criticism could only have some validity if he would have had us go on *as though* the very basis upon which we had agreed to work on common projects had not been put in question, and did not require its resolution before we could proceed. Curious logic. Our "failure" then was not to continue sending letters and documents after letters and documents we had already sent had gone unanswered.

Two days after we received [Horelick's] reply to the ultimatum, we answered every question he had ever raised and furnished him with every document we had ever promised. We did so because, overall, his letters of the 5th, 9th and 10th (the last two mailed and received together), indicated his desire to be of the section, and presented his contributions to that end. We merely noted that he had not dealt with the matter of their failure to participate.

On November 13th [1969], he had received and answered the modified ultimatum we had sent on the 8th. We did not answer this letter of his. We merely indicated in mid-November (the 18th) that we found much to object to, and would deal with it later.

It is a sad letter. Over the crucial matter of participation, it contains circular, self-justifying statements like, "We could have written, but we did not write." And it reiterates the criticism of our "failure," the answers to which were accessible to him. The whole ground covered and gained by his letters of the 5th, 9th and 10th (which our replies of the 14th and 15th built upon) was simply discarded.

He states we do, but we never claimed that their failure had been not to "write" for a period of three weeks; we did claim they did not communicate over the section's affairs up to the time of the ultimatum; we do know they did not participate. And when they did communicate with us, without knowledge of the ultimatum, it was to justify and extend its validity. Yet, by this displacement of their real failure on to a question of having "truly failed to write" in general, and backing that up with it being one of the "few definitive decisions" we made, he introduced into the debate a distortion at the root.

Sanguinetti (of the Italian section) was to write on November 21st: "The only justification for the first ultimatum would be a formal and common agreement on a project Tony and Jon agreed on formerly." Such projects existed, and in that Sanguinetti denies it, it is obvious that he had to get the basis of his statement from sources other than us. (Horelick was with the Italian section for a while, as later he was to be with the French section.) Aside from our communication of material over projects, Sanguinetti himself -- as others -- should have recalled that, at the conference table, in the discussion around projects -- and specifically the project on workers councils -- the American section mentioned what it considered its particular approach to it. The argument that there were no common projects is not serious.

The French section -- on the other hand -- didn't claim there were no projects: but in referring to the question of participation stated flatly that there was no *urgency*, such as to motivate sending an



ultimatum. It followed that, there being no urgency, the ultimatum was false. No matter how they cut it, however, the judgment that there was no urgency is the expression of an evolution of a problem the section could not then know as a whole, and therefore it could not adequately decide upon its practical ramifications (and urgency is nothing more than a practical ramification). Had it even accorded the shadow of validity to our claim to urgency -- and we were presumably in as good if not better position than [the members of the French section] to decide that -- they would have been led, as Sanguinetti before them, to want explanations, clarifications: they would have been led to want at least the establishment of a basis for a common decision.

Having deprived us in their minds of the only basis for our action, [the members of the French section] then presented reasons [for] their creation which they attributed to us. They took up Horelick's argument about truly failing to write in general for three weeks and turned it into: no one has ever been excluded for failing to give news of himself [sic] for even as much as three weeks. The section then proceeded to advance a corollary argument, which might be labeled "the conspiracy to exclude Verlaan." These theses have several defects. Weeks in any quantity have nothing to do with our stated reasons for excluding Verlaan. But were there *any* validity to their claim, it would mean we would have had to suddenly (somewhere between October 10 and November 7), and, for reasons they would also have to invent, formed the conspiracy to exclude him. An older conspiracy than that would have meant we passed up the long months of the winter and spring and summer of 1969, while the same was on a trip, did nothing and gave no "news" of himself, to wait until he had gone for even as long as three weeks to spring an exclusion on him. (Such an argument must have been particularly devastating in the eyes of the French section: in the years it had had to deal with Verlaan, it received perhaps one or two communications from him.) Were this not also imputing our integrity, it could be passed off entirely for the buffoonery it is.

It is in this letter of the 13th that Horelick completes the process of correcting his impressions of the period he and Verlaan worked together, and he tells us how he can say for sure that Verlaan at the institute worked very hard and effectively. A little further he adds that we have demanded of Verlaan -- O, insidious conspirators! -- to formally write up his criticism of the SI within a week. We had given Verlaan a month. It seems probable -- through Horelick's obvious attempts to defend Verlaan against us -- that we have here the source of the conspiracy thesis.

Finally, a brief note on procedure. [Horelick] tells us -- still in this November 13th letter -- that he does not intend to communicate with us again. Yet, in that we were still members of the same organization, and given that the only way to resolve difficulties was to develop a serious exchange over them, his resolve to cut off communication strikes us as one of the more byzantine aspects of the situation. On the 17th we phoned him (we had not yet received his letter of the 13th); he spoke with us, failing to mention -- to remember? his previous resolve. By the 20th, he wrote again, saying, "Your phone call seemed to be a second modification of your ultimatum of exclusion, which you presently continue to sustain." It was not a second modification, and he had not sought to verify his impression during the call. By the 26th, he had to write again to reaffirm his resolve to stop communication. On December 13th, it was necessary for the French section to act as the mediator of his requests to us.

The best that can be said for Horelick -- if he was convinced that we were out to get Verlaan, unreal and unrealistic as that was -- is that he decided to adopt not so much a position of solidarity as one of fidelity. To that, in the end, we could only really object (we have no quarrel with friendship) that he did not present his argument forthrightly: for if we were not his brothers, or even perhaps his friends, we were certainly his comrades. [If the argument had been] presented forthrightly, [it] would have allowed us to deal with the argument on its own grounds. A reading of his letters shows [...], even after he returned here in late December [1969] and had to write to us again, how much he was he was subject to an advanced state of confident confusion.

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The first "news" directly from Verlaan came on the 8th of November [1969], when we received two notes from him. On the part of our projects he was presumably concerned with -- workers councils -- he held out the promise of material to come. For the rest, the notes are devoted to requests he makes of us



that, as it turns out -- except for his request that we send a collection of junk to the institute -- do not bear directly on our common projects but have to do with new projects he has taken upon himself (translation -- his or someone else's -- and distribution of SI material-in Holland). He has done this without thought of its effect on our previously agreed upon projects, and without so much as giving a thought to the possibility that we might object -- for the present -- over his dividing his energies, with the deleterious effects this invariably would have on the projects he had agreed upon with us. On the 17th, we received another note from him in which he tells us of his new project: "I am thinking *now* of a Dutch translation of SI material, mainly of the American section (since I do like [issue] No. 1 a whole lot)." And, in a previous letter to Horelick, of which he sent us a copy: "As for *our* immediate activities in Holland, there will be [the] question of an edition of (1000 [copies]) [Rene] Riesel's article in Dutch, the *Poverty* pamphlet will appear as a brochure and in a student newspaper. *Totality for Kids* is under translation and so on and so forth. I am working my ass off."

Our common projects were in abeyance: the second issue of the review, the transmission of his work on workers councils, and the delegates meeting. On the workers councils, he had said he had discovered much, without a hint -- after five weeks -- of what that could be. On the delegates meeting and the review, he invented the pretext -- in the context of an insult, for emphasis -- that he simply could not read our "telegraphic style": this not only seemed to him an adequate reason for not dealing with any questions or propositions we made, but it also was obviously adequate to prevent him from initiating anything on these matters.

The 17th, however -- when we received the last of the notes referred to above -- was the deadline on the ultimatum. His note made clear that he had not seen the ultimatum letters, but that he knew through his brother that a letter was waiting for him, which he would be picking up on his way to Paris. Thinking him [to be] in transit, we phoned Horelick in Milan to tell him we knew Verlaan had not received the ultimatum and that naturally we would give him another week within which to deal with it.

It was all a waste of time. On the 17th, Verlaan had received and replied to the ultimatum. His reply was a series of counter-charges, baseless accusations and purely ideological justifications. *For the first time* -- despite any conspiracy thesis -- it became certain to us that there was no possibility of [reaching an] understanding with him, no mutual recognition, no transparency: we excluded him.

If it is true that the ultimatum situation set the scene for his turning to falsification, we made clear in our letter of exclusion that we were not excluding him for failing to respond to the ultimatum, but for his falsification of the history of our relations before and during the existence of the American section. We merely noted that he never did answer the terms of the ultimatum. We were surprised that no [other] section acknowledged the grounds for [the] exclusion as distinct from the ultimatum, but in their act of refusing it -- as they all did -- they merely seemed to assume it followed from the ultimatum. We even wrote a long letter in French, on the supposition that the English had eluded the translators. The reason, as will be seen later, lay elsewhere.

We committed here a breach of democratic practice. No one took note of it, except, after the fact, ourselves. Before excluding Verlaan, we should have notified Horelick of our view, and requested his. We should have done this since the American section still existed, and Horelick was still part of it, despite the fact that we knew he was then in transit, that he had stated he would no longer communicate with us, that he could probably not show us how Verlaan had not falsified the history of our relations (that [Horelick] had himself -- we thought perhaps through incomprehension of the circumstances -- distorted reference to those relations.) It was our obligation to give him the opportunity to state his position, even -- and no doubt especially -- if it turned out to be a minority position. It was our intention to bring up this breach of practice at the delegates meeting, the one we were never to attend.

We quote from Verlaan's letter the central passages we had to object to:

"The 'ultimatum' practice had been discussed in a *pre-conference sectional meeting*. It dealt with the same people now on the side of the ultimatum."

There was no ultimatum "practice," as the ultimatum he received was the first ever sent. He refers



however -- once again -- to the RAC affair, which concerned him and Chasse, and not "the same people now on the side of the ultimatum." These are convenient distortions of a liar: so the facts will fit the case he is trying to make in what follows.

"We revealed the *incoherence, intransparency*, the lack of subjective/objective confidence and the catastrophic consequences this ultimately had on our practice of last winter. Myself not being able to point my finger on the roots got to be very disenchanted with the entire *sectional* practice."

What we revealed was that after he had been involved for about three months with RAC -- and after a stormy argument about two weeks before, and after Verlaan had done nothing to break with RAC -- Chasse should have tried one more time to bring Verlaan to his senses by showing him the letter to the SI, on the Verlaan/RAC affair, before sending it. What the liar does here is to seek not only to justify his inactivity -- his effective nonparticipation in the section -- with reference to a situation which was considerably resolved already "last winter," before the formation of the section, but to blame both of us for that inactivity: an inactivity which was characteristic of him before and after RAC, through the medium of his "other" -- his so-called practical -- involvement.

"After a *critique*, we *reached an agreement* in Paris, that such measures should be handled with care, in coherence. Now, only five weeks after *you leave* Paris, I have only seen one letter I don't understand for good reasons, and two letters containing *ultimatums*, which I for even mere practical reasons cannot respond to (I received the first ultimatum on its deadline, the second left me two days [to respond])."

Not knowing where to find him was, as he tells us in one of his letters, was our fault: we should have known he was in Amsterdam. Further[more], we called Horelick, precisely over such deadlines.

"Furthermore, it appears [from] the *bullshit* those ultimatums contain that we haven't agreed over the past two months on anything in *practice*. With the horrid tales of your behavior at the printer and during the vacation, it would mean that nowhere [near] *two years* progress in our *practical* relationships has been made."

At the beginning of the paragraph, the liar can't even count: he received, aside from the two letters containing the ultimatum, three letters, one telegram and two documents. On the other hand, elsewhere in this same letter, he gives a list of the things he has sent: with the exception of a couple of incidental notes, his activity -- his writing -- starts after he was informed by his brother that a "special delivery" letter from us was waiting for him. We do not say the knowledge of it was the spur, but the coincidence is interesting. By the end of the paragraph, the liar refers to some gossip about [the] printer and [the summer] vacation that we are not aware of. As for the rest, we agree: no progress was made, and he is in this letter telling us why -- for the first time -- he has always made it impossible.

"Therefore, Post Office or not, Central Office or not, I am not ready to tolerate these (almost cyclic) pseudo-organizational *shows of coherence*, without going to the roots."

The only thing cyclic is RAC, his invention entirely. [Earlier, in this text] we deal with the idea that he presents here as [the] 'Central Office.' A liar always finds it convenient to distort what others say.

We doubt that anyone -- except a falsifier -- could have twisted the RAC situation to make it come out that we had been incoherent and lacked transparency. Simply, Verlaan had made an error in becoming a defacto member of RAC. He had -- formally -- recognized the error by correcting it. The position of solidarity we were to take after that was not with his error, but with his correction of it. Yet, by its perpetual return, it is obvious that something of the situation, something in the reaction to his involvement, had been unacceptable to him. We think he gives his reasons, finally when he writes, right after saying he is "going to the roots":

"It might help toward clarification to know that *I agreed* with the criticism by Raoul (Vaneigem) and Guy (Debord) made to my request for explanations for the breach of a formal,

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voted-upon agreement at the Conference, not because I found myself to be moral or unauthorized to criticism, but because my question was *inquisitorial*, *presumptuous*, and *disconfident*, destroying the very basis of our *equality* as comrades."

We would rather say it is the right -- indeed, the duty -- of any comrade to request explanations for the breach of any formal agreement and that such a request is neither inquisitorial, presumptuous nor "disconfident." Vaneigem and Debord had objected not to his right to question, but precisely to the moral censure in his comments.

Membership in an organization such as the SI implies responsibility and *accountability*. What Verlaan is telling us here is that he is accountable to no one: it is to destroy the very basis of equality among comrades to question one another, that is, to demand of one -- should that occasion come up -- that he account for his actions as a member. His is a moral view of relationships: those who are right are right forever in each other's eyes. It also follows, no doubt, that he could only, in the end, reconcile Chasse's questioning of his involvement with RAC by reversing the responsibility for his error, or even by having us share it. Such a line was bound to bring him to have to lie to himself and to us.

The present SI though has vindicated Verlaan's outlook by rejecting the exclusion: not only assuming a position of solidarity with a falsifier, but doing so blindly, without having seen this letter from Verlaan, on which we based his exclusion. Apparently, he was right forever in their eyes.

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The sections [of the SI] assimilated without distinction Verlaan's exclusion to the ultimatum: we judged that if that letter had been misunderstood, they must have been incapable of even reading the long and rather detailed ones we had sent. We wrote again, this time in French, on December 3rd, in order to reach directly both the French and the Italian sections. No dice.

We received -- several weeks after the French section had excluded us -- a letter from Riesel (of the French section), dated 13 December, sent by boat, arriving here the 14th of January [1970]. The requests in that letter show that everything done by the sections -- and by the French section in particular, which did more than the others -- was done without their having seen *any of the letters that had been handwritten* by Horelick and Verlaan, as well as having been unable to familiarize themselves with the content of the letters over RAC, as they no longer had copies. The handwritten letters include Horelick's of the 5th [December 1969], on which is *based* our modified ultimatum of the 8th, and *all* of Verlaan's letters, including, naturally, the one on which we had based his exclusion. We had assumed all correspondence had been read. We have not been told how the sections evaluated information they did not possess directly, nor why they did not ask for it, when it must have been clear to them that they did not possess it. It is -- in a way -- amusing that a request for information bearing upon a decision should be made after the decision has been formulated: and more amusing still that, in the light of all correspondence being exchanged by airmail, this one should be sent by boat (along with one other, incidental piece). By the time this December 13th letter was sent, the French section had already accused *us* of ignoring the realities of correspondence, as they called it.

On December 1st, Martin (of the Scandinavian section) wrote to say there was need for a complete explanation over the exclusion of Verlaan; he declared his agreement with the position taken by the Italian section on the matter. A few days later he wrote again: his anger made his English (not his native tongue) suffer considerably. We had asked him a simple question (about the composition of the editorial committee of the Scandinavian review), as a point of information. In conversation, he would no doubt have answered directly, easily. In writing, the question became an insult. He also decided to break off communication with us (byzantine was spreading).

On the 26th of November, accompanying a letter from Sanguinetti which we have already mentioned, was one from the Italian section. They demanded, essentially, three things: 1) that all resolutions on the problem of the American section be put off to the delegates meeting; 2) that, before then, a solid and thorough discussion be taken up by letter; [and] 3) that we *annul* the exclusion.



The Italian section has difficulties with French syntax and vocabulary: it is possible -- since they wrote to us in French -- that they did not really intend to use the word *annul*. At any rate, we obviously refused to annul an exclusion that was in question and up for discussion. We approved of their demand for a prior discussion, by letter, and went further: we demanded that documents be prepared for the delegates meeting that would oppose or contradict either the ultimatum or the exclusion or those two things together.

It was the last that we were to hear from the Italian section. Although they had "above all defended reasons of principle and method" over what had been their false appreciation of what impelled us: they were silent when the French section directly violated:

their proposals for the handling of the problem within the American section, to which Martin had adhered, and which we had approved in part;

as well as the "provisional statutes" ("each national section is master of its exclusions. . . . In the case where the facts would be disputed by the excluded comrades, or in the case where another section of the SI would ask for a new discussion on the very basis of the debate, those exclusions would be *suspended* until a general conference of the SI (or a meeting of delegates) which would take the final decision");

as well as the French section having abrogated direct democratic practice by taking upon itself the function of decision and execution for all.

Finally, the Italian section had taken the formal, general position that: "A proposed exclusion that would not be accepted does not necessarily lead to the exclusion of those who formulated it . . . but creates a situation which must be radically clarified." It is noteworthy that in proceeding against us, the French section did not meet the resistance of the Italian section when the former acted as though it did not have to take into consideration the positions of the latter in a matter which, according to the French section itself, was unprecedented.

When the French section first intervened in the "debate in the American section," it was to attempt, it seems, to be helpful: to furnish whatever information it had, which was felt to bear upon the situation. Riesel -- on the 13th of November -- and then Debord and Riesel (on the 14th) told us our letter of the 30th had been forwarded and noted that we would no doubt have to take into consideration these delays to explain in part, perhaps, the delays of Horelick and Verlaan. They had learned through the Italian section of Horelick's address. As for Verlaan, he "seems presently to be in Holland, at an address unknown to us." Around the same time, Horelick was himself speculating that Verlaan could be in Denmark or Holland, but that he was "probably in England." Verlaan must have assumed, naturally, that it was obvious to everyone that he was in Amsterdam.

The problem, however, was never one of the lost letters (Horelick entertained this particular fantasy once), or even their delay, to us or from us.

On November 25th, Riesel, having received the notice of exclusion of Verlaan, referred to the statutes and wrote to say that the French section "has charged me to inform you" that in such a case it demands a discussion on the roots of the problem at the meeting of the delegates, which will have to decide on the affair. The [French] section not only never acknowledged receipt of Verlaan's letter on which we based his exclusion, but in its subsequent speculations, it was never even so much as to acknowledge the existence of the letter. It is at this point that we judged our English had perhaps eluded the translators.

On December 3rd (the day we were writing our letter in French), the French section composed its position on the ultimatum and Verlaan's exclusion.

Stating that there was never an exclusion of this sort or "even vaguely resembling it," [the French section] passes in silence over the grounds for [the] exclusion: falsification and incoherence; grounds that were far from vaguely known in the exclusions of the past. Then it proceeds to give reasons for rejecting the exclusion as a measure following from the ultimatum.

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We are accused of forming a majority by virtue of being the only ones at a meeting (this in context is not a reference to our not having notified Horelick prior to excluding Verlaan, but to the majority position - that made the ultimatum possible). They list two reasons for sending an ultimatum: "in the case where the SI would appear compromised by public errors, where the demand would be made to correct them publicly," as was the case with the English [situationists], for example; "or else in practical, dramatically urgent cases, to demand their participation without further delay," as was the case with Horelick and Verlaan. Yet, despite facts to the contrary, the French section simply states: "Neither of these two conditions existed in the recent crisis of the American section." We are accused of not taking into account "dates" in the realities of communication. And that "a real majority engaged in a real conflict still has the absolute obligation to take into account the objections or justifications of the comrades who have been put into question." This is said as though we had not answered Horelick in detail; or as though, after Verlaan had deployed his lies and incoherence, we were still in the "obligation" of dealing with anything else. We are accused of using a "bureaucratic tone," and "artificial precipitation," and constituting a "tribunal" to judge the absent with heavy-handed partiality.

Finally -- unless for the French section the accusation is already the proof -- as though it had proven something by a series of unfounded or verifiably false accusations, we are told that "outside of these indisputable evidences, the French section simply refuses to admit that a situationist could ever be excluded for having stayed even up to three weeks without giving news of himself to his section, while it is known and admitted that he is on a "trip." Here then is the first official reason for Verlaan's exclusion. It is as little related to the real stated reasons as everything else, but it nevertheless opens the way for: "It is easy to see that it is precisely because there was no sustainable motive for an exclusion that this technique of the ultimatum -- itself unsustainable in this case -- was used to bring these futilities to the level of exclusion." The pettiness of these conceptions is almost beyond imagining: but the conspiracy thesis found its home.

Having accused us of so many distortions, manipulations, lack of honesty and seriousness, of conspiracy to undo a comrade, and presented all these things as "indisputable evidence," we were surprised that [the members of the French section] did not see the logic of their position and find themselves compelled, in the light of their pseudo-knowledge, to propose our exclusion.

Ten days *later*, as mediator for Horelick, Riesel was to address to us his request for copies -- for sending to [the] other sections -- of all of Horelick's and Verlaan's letters written by hand, plus two letters sent to Vaneigem -- for the SI -- concerning Verlaan and RAC. Given the delays in the transmission of mail that do exist around this time of year, it is doubtful that even if this letter had been sent by air, we would have had the time to make the copies and return them, even directly to the sections, before what was to follow [their exclusion].

On the 19th [of December, 1969], the French section moved to assume its role as the deciding and executory section. After throwing in a few false facts (for example, that we threatened the Italian section), it gets to the point: "The ensemble of the International has already refused the exclusion of comrade Verlaan by qualifying it a false exclusion. It goes without saying that those who have pronounced a false exclusion are excluded by virtue of that fact alone. Everything that was discussible has been discussed; this is no longer." We are then told that the "American section" [Horelick and Verlaan] will contact us for turning over of SI property to them.

We had effectively nothing to discuss with an executory section. Our letter of resignation was sent on the 28th [of December, 1969], four days after received their notice. Everyone else, all being in Europe, probably received the exclusion letter before we did. It gave any section -- or individual -- ample time to protest, as our resignation did, the many violations which the act of the French section constituted. No one protested.

### THE LOGIC OF FALSIFICATION

The SI, having advanced to the perception and statement of groundrules for the internal functioning of an international revolutionary organization formed of those not directly engaged in the process of

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production, at the first test of their *international* application, was in capable of overcoming its negative history: its centralist practice [of its early years]. There was then, in fact, no trust in the methods of direct democratic practice.

Our resignation marked publicly our refusal to brook these violations, and their consequent return to the rules of the old world; violations which at least after receipt of our resignation the SI became aware of. The only revolutionary alternative then was for the organization to publicly correct itself: censure the French section, cancel its action, and therefore accept our resignation as the mark for the organization of the public and practical rejection of centralist practice and its implicit hierarchical relations. These actions probably would have left the organization healthy enough to recognize the falsifier [Verlaan] -- on the basis of accessible information: his letters -- and to exclude him.

Instead the SI has already taken steps toward the longer and more painful destructive process both for its part in the revolutionary development as a whole, and for the members of the SI as individuals (since one is not a voluntary slave without serious consequences): it has resorted to falsification.

The executory section has excluded us with a final "everything that was discussable has been discussed; this is no longer." Apparently, however, all the [French] section had meant by its definitive pronouncements was merely to "propose" that we be excluded.

The delegates of the four sections, on January 19th [1970], sent us a copy of a second letter of exclusion. They take note, they say, of the *propositions* to exclude us made by Verlaan (he had threatened it, although it might be argued that the threat was already the proposition), by Martin (he sent us a hostile letter, where it is implied that an exclusion will take place, but not necessarily ours -- he had previously indicated he was not aware of all the facts -- but this becomes, in the requirements of the moment, a proposition for our exclusion), and by the French section (which had hardly proposed it, it had done so). The executory section will be displeased to learn that Horelick, when he had again to deal directly with us in early January, was out of step with the latest imperatives and referred to its letter as that of our exclusion.

A way the ensemble of the SI could have effectively transformed the action of the French section into a proposition, would be for someone -- other than in the form of our resignation -- to have questioned the very basis of the action: the same process that met in fact the exclusion of Verlaan. The logic of such a situation, however, would have led the ensemble to notify us that the reasons (the violations) *leading* to our resignation had been put in question. Verlaan's exclusion, for the ensemble, would have still been in question. No such thing was done. And the delegates, meeting someplace in [East] Germany (not in Luxembourg, where we would have gone, in the original set-up) of course are not proceeding secretly against us on the basis of "propositions" and a situation we are unaware of: we are already out of it (and this second letter of exclusion is addressed appropriately not to us but to the sections). They are merely making the internal picture of direct democracy consistent with the imperatives of those who decide.

If not already so, it will become obvious that these four delegates (Martin, [Claudio] Pavan, Riesel, Verlaan) merely manufactured on paper a solution to the violations of the executory section. [The delegates'] letter is written in English: they should have chosen a language more familiar to them. As it is, rather than proceed to pronounce our exclusion on the basis of these "propositions," they declare that they "agree" with the exclusion. This little subtlety -- which no doubt escaped them -- reveals the true relationship: they are placing their rubber-stamp on the actions already executed.

This done, the delegates reassert themselves as though they had pronounced the exclusion in the name of their sections, by giving a second official reason for the exclusion: the exclusion of Verlaan is no longer for our conspiracy involving his not having given news of himself for even so long as three weeks, but that we had a more subtle goal: to attempt to exclude him in order to reorganize the SI along our bureaucratic rules. Verlaan savior! A fitting role.

When adherence to agreements, to established practice, to accepted groundrules is called "bureaucratic rules," we have proceeded so far into the domain of the false that all of reality has merely become a moment of it.



- We know that it is in the logic of falsification, yet it is a pain to see reappear a defense of every twist and turn the center that dominates [the situationists] imposes -- and in the end inflicts -- upon them.
- Voluntary surrender to the master is the worst form of slavery: it condones [the master], it assumes his right, and assures it.

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The SI as it is now organized is already of the old world. As we said at the start, what is serious is that as a result of this internal crisis, the organization no longer is what it appears to be, at any level, so that, continuing to exist, it must do so as a fake revolutionary organization. Expressing a retardation in the organized opposition to the prevailing order, it introduces that retardation into the revolutionary moment developing before us.

We have placed the SI before its unawareness of its own image.





# An extract from the Orientation Debate of the Ex-Situationist International

By Paolo Salvadori, May 1970

Translator unknown

## I. The point at which we find ourselves

If it seems that we cannot yet come up with a strategy which is sufficiently precise in relation to the course that the class struggles and revolutionaries periods in all countries will follow -- a historical movement which is still, moreover, latent, outside of its general presuppositions and first practical self-clarifications -- nevertheless, this is what we will have to do soon. If we still have not had the chance to grasp, for example, what the intervals between one revolution and another will be, what the international strategy will be ("the class battle array"), what new forces will develop in it (USA, USSR) and what level power's intelligence will reach, we are nonetheless at the beginning of this constructive period, where all the essential problems already pose themselves in direct relation to the action of conscious workers. Thus, we must be just as much aware of the peril of falling into a pure representation of globalness without development of our activities, as the opposite -- of not representing this globalness. One could say that we are at the same point as the Communist League, at the beginning of a historical period full of alternatives.

## II. Organizational method

Consequently, the life of the organization and organizational rapports will not be derived simply from the fact of "recognizing a necessity and putting oneself at the service of this necessity," in the sense of a totally objective position created by the SI for its members. This method is, and must necessarily still be, seeing a necessity in the development of our capacities/possibilities, defining our tasks insofar as they are our own tasks, which is to say what we want as the group of individuals that we are (naturally, it is only a matter of an accentuation in the rhythm of unitary progression, but which continually becomes real through our consciousness of the stakes, of risk, of the element of the arbitrary that there is in all of our actions, of the radical subjectivity which is still almost exclusively their original terrain). All this can be summed up in the fact that the SI can be defined *grosso modo* in relation to its universal significance or in relation to its concrete present (according to Vaneigem or according to Debord, if this parallel can mean anything), as a revolutionary organization, practical political force or as a group of individuals, of theoreticians. It goes without saying that there is not any opposition which is not dialectical; it is a matter of moments summoned to succeed one another in reality.

## III> On theoreticians and theory

It seems that there has been among us a tendency to judge purely theoretical activity as no longer sufficient, or that it is becoming insufficient in the new epoch. And one can add that which for too long has paralyzed theoretical production -- a phenomenon which is as much the consequence as the cause of the "disciplinary excess" -- seems to be, among other things, the feeling of having already becoming the masters -- though without slaves -- of theory; something which is only true in comparison to the somnambulists who have the originality to still be totally deprived of theory; a relation which is the opposite of the way we define ourselves.

But if we can't go beyond theory without using it decisively in practice, neither can we exert ourselves in practice except by means of our own theory. To attempt the supercession of our role as a group of theoreticians implies knowing clearly that the only solution beyond this group is the revolutionary



organization, in the developed and complete form it will assume. Thus, I am convinced that it is on the path of theory that we will meet practice, new comrades and new actions. Now, when, after the first alarm signal, intellectuals and students still dream of washing away their remorse in a bath of "praxis," the SI can only continue on the opposite path with the certainty of finding its confirmation there.

We are still principally a group of theoreticians (before arriving at being simply conscious revolutionaries). But we are not only that. We are also something more, in the sense of the practical objective terrain created around us by our theory, and we have always been something before being a group of theoreticians, in the sense that the practical coherence in our interpersonal rapports and of each of us in his own life constitutes the practical basis of our solidarity (something that translates itself precisely in the method of not even discussing practical lapses since, beyond these, coherence must be a presupposition.) We are above all a group of rebels, or we are nothing. Strictly speaking, we are at the intersection of all classes, and thus we are no longer belong to any class. We know the bourgeoisie by direct experience; in culture and in daily life we have finished with its decadence; as proletarians we continue to work our way up; we are guerrillas because we are not aligned materially with any social stratum. Socially we are nothing, and, moreover, for us the society is nothing. From the point of view of Power, we don't exist, or at least we shouldn't exist. From the social intersections out of which we have come, to those where we are, we have found the space to choose our cause, even though there is no other practical one. From the point of view of the working class, it is inevitable that we must assume a separate existence, that if we exist it is only as "intellectuals," "militants," "leaders": as long as the workers reify us, our presence will seem foreign to them, as they are foreigners to themselves. But it is for the revolutionary workers that we exist on the terrain of a dynamic encounter in the one *common* project that is destined to become permanent. There, where we exist, it is beyond classes, outside of the perspective of Power. Our positive social being is nothing, and by this alone the negation is everything: it is only in the movement that this dialectical existence can reveal itself and take form.

The "Theses of April" (Debord, *IS* # 12) define the SI's direction of progress as having to put the accent more on the diffusion of theory than on its elaboration, though the latter must continue. I want to call attention to the fact that to accomplish this, it is important first of all to put theory in a condition where it can be effectively diffused. The first step of theory's advance *towards practice* takes place within theory itself: thus, the diffusion of theory is inseparable from its development. The task of providing all our formulated and implicit theses with a systematic and completely dialectical development, one which will not only bring them to the point where they can no longer be ignored by anybody, but also to the point where they circulate among the workers "like hotcakes" and themselves become the finally discovered cause of a definite grasping of consciousness (a scandal) -- this is certainly a theoretical task. But it also has an immediately practical utility: it is, more precisely, both necessary and banal in the moment that the SI is more or less led to play a hand of "double or nothing" with history.

Let us consider, for example, the excellent project of the *Situationist Manifesto* (only in this sense, that it is done by situationists). I think that some of the difficulty in its conception must be attributed to the fact that a certain level of the development of theory has yet to be attained. Which means: the theory of the SI is solid and already assumes a mature form without entering old age (insofar as it is the last theory, if this epoch's decisive revolution must be the last revolution). But beyond the fact that the SI's manifesto has to be translated into all the languages spoken by the modern proletariat and diffused among the workers, it should endure *at least* as well as the *Communist Manifesto*, but without having its faults and deficiencies. Therefore, it clearly can't be a book, nor an article (like, say, the "Address to Revolutionaries of All Countries") that one would arbitrarily call a "manifesto": rather, it must be the geometric locus of the theory of modern society, and the constant reference point of all future revolution. In this sense, Guy [Debord's] project of settling our accounts with Marx, in calculating precisely the degree of historic accuracy of his analyses and predictions, is a preliminary step, though not a necessary one. More generally, one theory certainly runs throughout all of the SI articles, from which it may be easily drawn, but in them our theory has to be precisely reconstructed by the reader. At present, it must be unified and synthesized, for which some additional analyses will be in order. In particular, the new simplicity of language we are seeking today will in no way render it familiar. Thus, we have as an intermediary task to that of the Manifesto the task of scientifically developing all the outlined themes (articles, pamphlets, books).



On the contrary, Rene Riesel's proposal for a *Wildcat Striker's Handbook* should be realized immediately, if we add to the brief history of the wildcat's critique in acts of the unions, and of its movement, a critique of the worker milieu and a short final programmatic chapter (defeat of the revolutionary movement, bureaucracy, spectacular commodity society, return of the social revolution, Workers' Councils, classless society). We'd have the follow-up to *On the Poverty of Student Life* corresponding to a "Strasbourg of the factories" and the premise of the [Situationist] *Manifesto*.

Finally, it seems to me that the *Manifesto* project is the way in which we (re)present to ourselves the necessity of a global advance in the relation between all our theses, as well as between them and the real movement, and that it thus presupposes the realization of almost all the other projects of theoretical work that have been formulated in the course of this debate. For example, Rene's and Raoul's pamphlet on the Workers' Councils and the critique of Pannekoek; of the four important projects presented by Guy, at a minimum 1). the analysis of the "two related failures" (insofar as it refers to the process of the formation of conscious revolutionary organization, and to the critique of the current process of a purely spontaneous struggle) and 2). tied to the critique of the past Councils and of councilist ideology, the definition of the armed coherence (a programmatic sketch) of the new Councils which "will be situationist or nothing." Thus, the "Preface to the practical critique of the modernized old world" opens up research on a real anti-reformism and on new forms of mass or generalized action in the proletariat's process of development towards an autonomous movement, the first phase of which is manifested by sabotage, by wildcat strikes, and above all by its new and *modern* demands. Moreover, it will still be necessary to re-examine the question of historical class determination, notably that of the working class and its revolutionary *nature*, insofar as it remains through its material position in society the bearer of all humanity's consciousness. (Tony [Verlaan]: "We must affirm that the workers will be able to be revolutionary and the only ones who can be so effectively." Raoul [Vaneigem]: "The path of the worker is direct; all he [sic] has to do is be conscious of his power -- because the fate of the commodity is in his hands -- in order to leave his brutalization behind and stop being a worker. His positivity is immediate. The intellectual, is, at best, of the negative. . . . Our critique must now bear essentially on the worker milieu, the motor of the proletariat.") Essential chapters are, thus, the analysis of capitalism and of American society with its new declassed [groups]; the critique of the most modern ideologies (in relation to the suppression in acts of political economy and of the retardation of the revolution; urbanism as destruction of the city; automation as liberatory in itself; ecology as crisis of consciousness of the present society which compels it to point out to itself its need to transform the relations of production, and, linked to all of the above, the critique of daily life conducted by Power itself: "situationism"); the analysis of the material presence in work and in daily life of all the fragmentary elements of the totality, of the historical project in its entirety, of that which the disappearance of art, the decomposition of philosophy, and the bankruptcy of science couldn't abolish, and which they have, to the contrary, injected everywhere in making it a definitive acquisition of the workers who are henceforth becoming its conscious inheritors. In general, there is the need to pursue the international strategy of the revolution by politico-historical articles on different countries, that is to say, to continue to translated *Society of the Spectacle* in ways such as "Decline and Fall of the Spectacular-Commodity Economy," and more beyond that. (Italy still awaits the translation of *Society of the Spectacle*.)

Another project that I believe useful to add on its the following: beginning with a quick run-through of the past revolutions (like Marx [did] in the *Manifesto*, Engels in the introduction to *Class Struggles in France*, Trotsky in 1905, Pannokoek in *Workers' Councils*) leading up to an answer to the question, "Why the next revolution will be the last." The history of the workers' movement -- which is covered in some of its aspects in many articles, and whose line is best traced in "The Proletariat as Subject and Representation" [a chapter in Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*] and in Riesel's critique of the councils in *IS* #12 -- is still far from being a waning subject on which everything of consequence has already been said. But to succeed in clarifying why modern revolutions are henceforth, and for the first time, *only proletarian*, in a moment which witnesses a decisive transformation of the worker and of work itself, that what I think would be of still greater interest. Thus, the revolutions of the past failed to attain, except marginally, that without which the modern revolution could not even begin: the fact that one can only achieve victory by demanding the totality expresses itself in the fact that there are no more struggles except for the totality. One could start from a definitive critique and from a *justification* of Russian Bolshevism (of Trotsky and Lenin) relative to the real conditions of the Russian proletariat, the latter considered in relation to the conditions of the modern proletariat which creates simultaneously the



impossibility of Bolshevism and the necessity of councils "no longer at the periphery of that which is ebbing, but at the center of that which is rising." But it leads also to the verification of Marx's general thesis: as long as the existent relations of production are not exhausted and have not entered into contradiction with the development of the productive forces (in the global historical sense that includes the development of the revolutionary class itself and of the consciousness that produces history), the revolution runs the greatest risk, up until now never avoided, of being defeated and of leading to a modernization of domination. Each revolution lets loose all the possibilities (in 1789 as in 1871 and in 1917), but realizes *in the final analysis* only those that correspond to the level attained by the development of the productive forces. Of all the possibilities opened up by each revolution, it always seems to choose the nearest. All the possibilities are there, but certain of them remain invisible, while others are in everybody's mind: evidently, it is daily life, the immediate relation with the existing world, which puts them there. This can just as well be expressed in saying that in all revolutions, the negation is never absolute, that the *positive* plays a big part, either as positive or inversely as the *determination* of the negation: if the condition of victory consists in reducing the former, it is also just as much concerned with reinforcing the latter, in reducing the positive to its objective base.

It seems to me also that *in all* of situationist theory, we have arrived at a point where we must start all over again, rewrite it a second time, in concerning ourselves with those mediations treated too rapidly and with the interstices which are still to be discovered. The recognized value of writing books, for example (books that in the present epoch the workers will begin to read) evidently rests on the necessity of superceding the opening moment of hostilities on a new front of the modern critique.

"Just as a building is not finished when its foundation is constructed, neither is the attainment of the concept of the totality the totality itself." Thus we see the only possible mode of progress for the journal [*Internationale Situationniste*] consist in making it the simple bulletin of the activity of the SI. Reducing strictly theoretical research in it, the journal should consist almost exclusively of notes: to inform people of our activity, to criticize revolutionaries, to continually disentangle ourselves from aspects of recuperation or from enemies, to present immediate analyses of on-going class struggles and organizational texts. This would thus be only the most direct means by which we participate in the process of the formation of conscious revolutionary organization.

In conclusion, we ourselves don't have a head start at this beginning of an epoch. It is the beginning of an epoch for us, too. The SI was able to trace some of the fundamental alternatives and perhaps all the modern directions of development in a few condensed sentences; but that's precisely why it is almost a question of beginning (except for the spectacle, the critique of daily life, such and such brief but good politico-historical text on the revolutions, and naturally the analysis of May '68). On theory, there exists today particularly the method, which must verify itself through the various concrete aspects in making theory itself more profound in a decisive manner, precisely because "the force of spirit is as great as its externalization." Certainly we have already written in fragments the [situationist counterpart to Marx's] *German Ideology*; but the [situationist] *1844 Manuscripts* will be the text that Guy proposes for the historical detournement of Marx. We have begun to consider the [Situationist] Manifesto at the same time as a [situationist] *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Furthermore, we don't only come from Hegel and Marx. [Vaneigem's *The Treatise on Living* [more commonly known as *The Revolutionary of Everyday Life*] has only opened the way: anti-utopia is an unknown territory which up until now nobody has come back to. It is this, rendered possible on the bases of modern society, that must make up for the "insufficiency of Marx" just as it must be rendered dialectical and find a practical use.

[Editor's note: first published in translation by American pro-situ journal *Implications* in 1975.]

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# Is the Reichstag Burning?

By the Italian section of the Situationist International, Milan,  
October 1970

Translated by Michel Prigent

In Italy today any excuse is enough to set a revolt on the path of social revolution: at Caserta it was a football match; at Reggio Calabria, a regional assembly. It's not the state which *chooses* to give up, as the right-wing press says; on the contrary, the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat force it more and more to give up. In this new period of crisis, Reggio Calabria is the first example of a town in the midst of capitalist exploitation, which mutinied for more than three months, and organized itself. Cut off by a general wildcat strike and state of siege, the town bravely defended the freedom it had won, firing without restraint on the police forces, and setting up strong barricades.

Even if this uprising was confused at the start, its duration and the violence with which it affirmed itself show the amount of real strength and clarity it achieved. A really radical practice, in all its variations, is the guarantee of every freedom. But in Italy all is compromised, even counter-revolution! As if further proof were needed to show how ridiculous the Italian political class is, Colombo, the Prime Minister, could do no better than [try to] pass off the weakness of the state as its strength: "No one should confuse the moderation and stability which the state has shown -- and which is its strength -- with weakness." The truth is that at the time the authorities were powerless to restore order to the streets.

As for the Stalinists of the so-called "Communist Party," they never stopped slandering the revolt right from the beginning, and "with a strong appeal to the more responsible forces of the majority," calling the Government to its "responsibilities" and "sense of duty" in the face of the uprising's continuation. Just as they were the most ruthless in sabotaging the railworkers' strike, which was ridiculing the directives of the Italian Trade Union Organization (CGIL) and making a qualitative step toward the revolution, so the "Communists" were the most ruthless in asking for the murderous intervention of the police and the army against the "fascist revolt." As if the facts were not enough in themselves, the lies of the Stalinist mob were shown up by a fascist newspaper: "THIS IS A REVOLT OF AN ENTIRE POPULATION AGAINST THE STATE."

At the beginning of the revolt, the direct interests of the whole local Cabal (Mayor, archbishop, lawyers and leading figures) were much in evidence, but they immediately changed into direct opposition to the uprising, and began to negotiate with their colleagues in Rome for the surrender of the city, in exchange for the satisfaction of their miserable demands. The original spectacular problem of the capital of the region didn't trick anyone any more.

The police authorities could no longer hope that a strategy such as that of December 12th [1969] would stop the revolt, and they were already prepared to take the risk of open war. The provocateur and police explosions of December 12th [in Milan] only momentarily stopped the inevitable movement that was making a mockery of all the efforts of the [Italian] Communist Party (PCI) for social peace. In the months following the repression, there were many trials, but the real trial had already taken place, and was celebrated in the streets of Reggio for more than three months. Sentence was passed in the third month, when the proletariat of Reggio repeatedly opened fire on the police. The Government and the Stalinists will pay dearly for their victory over Reggio.

Stalinists, Gentlemen of the Government, notables: You may swallow Reggio, but you cannot digest it!

In short, the Reggio revolt was the first real uprising of the Italian revolution. Inadequate, unfulfilled, often muddled, and, above all, slandered, it has the merit of bringing to a close the stage of easily repressed straight-forward revolts, like Battipaglia, Caserta and the prisons, and has finally opened the period of armed revolt. At Reggio, for the first time in Italy, the state saw itself scandalously and enduringly *ignored*, and in that moment, directly attacked. So there's no need to wonder at the many and

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real weaknesses of this uprising, but rather to marvel at its strength. The best thing that this uprising produced is its example, which is destined to catch on and reoccur.

-Having said this, we don't know how else the proletariat of Reggio can be analyzed.

Now the issue is in the hands of the wildcat strikers of the north. The revolutionary crisis of Italy will continue to become more complicated, until it opens the door to a radical simplification.

If the revolt of Battipaglia showed up the farce of Platonic solidarity between all the left political groups, from the PSI to the Maoists, so far no politically conscious group dares to identify [itself] with the Reggio uprising, for none would dare to admit its own contradiction: that they all abuse and actively oppose the movement that unmasks them. Never before did the Chinese clowns of "Lotta Continua" so cover themselves with ridicule as when they arrived, with the army and police reinforcements, to recuperate the revolt for the sake of their movement. There is no worse insult to the inventors of lies than to tell the truth.

While there were no more abusive fascist provocateurs in Reggio during the revolt than in the rest of the region, they were insufficiently guarded against, and they made things very easy for the PCI Stalinists, who, instead of denouncing the fascists as such, took the opportunity to call the revolt "reactionary and fascist." But telling the truth is the privilege and the right of the revolutionary press. We say firmly that the intervention of the army and the state of siege are the real victories of the long uprising at Reggio. Why in fact was the state of siege declared? Because a city had risen and taken up arms. So, long live sieges in every city!

The other victory of the Reggio revolt was to show clearly to workers of both [the] North and South the really repressive police role of the so-called Communist Party and the union bureaucracies in this revolutionary epoch. Having acknowledged the overwhelming defeat of the union police, the Minister of Labour suggested, on October 18th [1969], the formation of an actual corps of "work-police." Once that is done, Italy will have nothing left to envy in Maoist China, where the army forces the workers to work.

The government is at times ready to break the laws of its own state because, in a moment of revolutionary crisis, when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy, the Government has one sole and inviolable law: *the survival of the state*. We have never denied it: "Ours is not the domain of law, but that of the revolution." The Government, for its part, has abandoned its legal hypocrisy; it stands in the revolutionary arena, for the domain of the counter-revolution is also that of the revolution.

The real movement of the Italian proletariat is heading towards the point of no return, both for the movement and its enemies. The illusions about the possibility of establishing "normalcy" are dissolving one by one, and so it becomes necessary for both sides to risk their own present in order to win their own future. In spite of the methodical recovery of the unions, and Old and New Left bureaucrats, the revolutionary movement is gaining in strength. Confronted with this, power has to resume the old comedy of "law and order," playing this time the divisive card of terrorism, in an attempt to remove the situation that will force it to expose its whole game in the face of revolutionary evidence. The anarchists' attempts of 1921, the hopeless acts of the survivors of the revolutionary movement's breakdown of that time, gave the Italian bourgeoisie a useful pretext to establish, with fascism, martial law on the whole society. The bourgeoisie today doesn't need the old anarchists' mistakes to find an excuse for the political realization of its own totalitarian reality; it is trying to make such a pretext on its own account, fitting the new anarchists into a police frame-up, or manipulating the most gullible among them in a crude provocation. The anarchists, indeed, offer the best qualifications for the power structure's requirements: a detached and ideological image of the real movement. Their spectacular "extremism" allows power to hit, through them, the real extremism of the movement.

The practical problem which Reggio, and all other battles of the last four years in which blood has been split, has clearly been posed to the workers isn't the problem of disarming the police, but that of arming the proletariat.

The power which exists could have been taken only from us, and therefore only by us can it be re-taken



and ABOLISHED. We owe nothing, because we own nothing. But just because of this, we are more dangerous than any creditors!

— Comrades!

Our target isn't only the police: its also the PCI Stalinists, the union bureaucrats and the Maoists. Where revolutionary violence begins, reformism begins to end.

Soldiers!

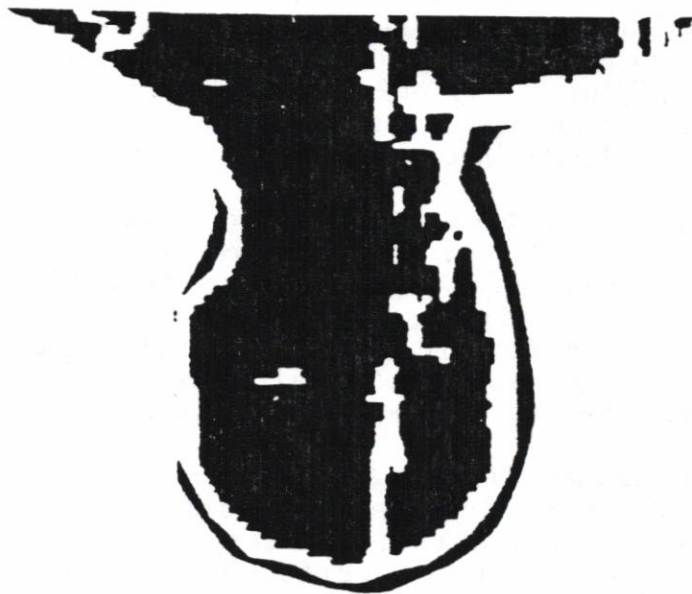
In such circumstances, we don't ask you to disobey; you are bound to do so by the logic and honesty of the proletariat whom you will be summoned to repress!

Long Live the Revolutionary Proletariat of Reggio Calabria!

Long Live the Railworkers' Wildcat Strike!

Long Live the Comrades who in every factory in Italy are tearing down the webs woven by the PCI and other bureaucrats!

Long Live the Absolute Power of the Workers' Councils!





# Letter from Guy Debord to Jon Horelick and Tony Verlaan, members of the American section of the Situationist International

Paris, 28 October 1970

Included in manuscript entitled *Debat d'Orientation de l'Internationale  
Situationniste*, translator unknown

Dear comrades:

I must reply to your letter of 21 September [1970] by explaining to you why, regrettably, I will not take part in the tendency of which you have begun to lay down the groundwork.

I'll explain to you first my regret. To the degree that I have been able to know Jon, I have seen nothing that divides us; and in my latest conversations with Tony, we were sincerely in agreement about the general questions that we discussed (the necessities of practice, the proletariat, the urgency of criticizing the inert illusionism in the SI etc.). But what is more important in my eyes is the fact that up to now you are the *only ones* to have undertaken a response to my text of 27 July [1970] ("Remarks on the Situationist International Today"), when one would have, literally, to be a *voluntary blindman* not to see the practical urgency of it (an urgency augmented still more, in the few days following, by the scandalous adventure of Paolo [Salvadori]). I believe you are right to want to form a tendency, for careful regroupings are obviously the only way to get out of the derisive paralysis that has displayed itself in the SI since Venice -- indeed for 18 months or 2 years -- and which now can last no longer.

Here unfortunately my approval of your position ends. For it looks certain to me that the true tendency must constitute itself on deep and exact analysis of past errors (theoretical and practical), must have propose for itself a precise program on the basis of this analysis. But I consider that your analysis of the past is at the same time superficial and incorrect. In addition, your currently stated main program point appears unrealistic and deadly. Finally, a related question that was added to the discussion at the same time (the use of our finances) seems to me to be a regression from our former habits. I am going to summarize for you my point of view on each of these three questions, successively.

First let's talk about your analysis of the errors of the SI since Venice. This analysis is dominated by a kind of anger about the predominance of the French section in the management of all of our affairs (whereas, to me, it's more the *quasi-nonexistence* of this French section that would be the more serious problem). I must remind you of this: the French section has never intermixed, in any way, with the activity of the SI in America or Scandinavia (nor with your theory, nor with your practice, nor with your outside contacts, etc.). If it did involve itself, once or twice, with our policies in Italy (participation in the analysis of "the cold autonome," and advice about the attitudes to take in the face of the December [1969] repression), it was at the request of the Italians, justified notably by our geographic proximity; and nobody could complain about the outcome of our advice. This geographic proximity was pushed to its culminating point at the end of December 1969, when the *whole* Italian section assembled in Paris for a stay.

It's also necessary to take this reality into account: at this time, the French and Italian sections comprised four-fifths of the participants in the SI. Their accord on every urgent question was ipso facto a majority. If we had used this majority to deliver policy directives to you of whatever sort, one could speak of non-respect for the autonomy of the sections. But we never made any decisions -- in the successive crises of the Italians -- except about urgent problems that uniquely concerned cases of evident departure from rules of participation common to *us all*. This form of "activity," altogether elementary and boring,

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was imposed on us like a hardship, and was never sought out as a pleasure. (You are right to say that Paolo's last telephone conversations are a manifest excess, but do they mean that Paolo was teleguided from Paris? Appropriately, his operation did not succeed.) To summarize: On every important question, the French section did not interfere, but there have been, unfortunately, very few [important questions], in America as elsewhere. And it's that which is fundamentally deserving of criticism. To find oneself having to manage routine and misery is not an enviable job. You give the impression, not of regretting the underdevelopment of our real autonomous activity here and elsewhere, but rather of regretting that your remoteness didn't allow *you* to listen to tens of hours of regressive chitchat and to repeat some "policy" that has been obvious for 10 years. I am persuaded that you, in our place, would have said the same thing (with a little more or a little less success). But it is strange that you should appear to consider your absence from *this* as a lack. If you had the same troubles in your contacts with a Mexican section, we wouldn't have therefore considered *you* to be bosses impeding *our* autonomy. (Perhaps you're thinking about some debatable decision we would have taken about some real theoretical or strategic question? But I really don't know what it is a question of, and you ought therefore to clarify it).

Your superficial critique is also imprecise. You write that, "The first Italian crisis immediately affected the French section." You are forgetting that, right after Venice, the first crisis was American. It immediately concerned all other situationists, and not just "Paris." We *all* stepped in to defend *you*. Do you think that the autonomy of the American section would have been more respected if we had left you out? In fact, the lack of autonomy of the sections doesn't come from the authority of a center (nor from a foreign majority), but from the infantilism of sections that haven't learned how to find a concrete field of action, and which haven't even learned to establish correct interpersonal relations (Tony demonstrated very well the interaction of these two factors in his first intervention here in the "Orientation Debate").

I come now to your program. Its main proposition consists of re-examining the cases of certain excluded or resigned members (without specifying anyone). You start out from this strange idea that, since everything is not excellent and beyond criticism in the current SI, all exclusions (or only some of them?) have something perverted about them. But I don't agree with this view: the breaks have not been made in the name of a would-be perfection, against strictly or arbitrarily designated failures, but simply on the basis of certain realities that we have not found it possible to accept. There are no unjustified exclusions (or, rather, the only three such [unjustified] attempts were refused). We have always been too indulgent and in no way too strict. There have not been too many "shortcomings" declared unacceptable; there have been too few. I'm certainly not using these terms in a moral or psychological sense. It's not a question of being amiable or being nasty. It's a question of defining in a demystified fashion what *we* want and are able to do; and how to do it effectively. Certain [excluded] comrades were very sympatico and had some real capabilities. Their participation could be of great value in certain general circumstances many times described by us. I am thinking, for example, of Donald [Nicholson-Smith] and Eduardo [Rothe]: they were excluded, one and then the other, two years apart, for having totally failed to live up to an accord on a specific problem, an accord that they agreed to after very extended discussions. In revoking the enforcement of this basic rule of the game, the SI would be ten times worse.

I've talked here again about those who are "better excluded." In proposing to re-examine old separations, you are completely ignoring the truest cause of the obvious deficiency of the SI: it's a question of the mediocrity -- by comparison to stated criteria and goals -- of most of the comrades who have participated in the SI. And in this respect, one really must admit that the SI has not been as democratic as it thought. You can see this from the simple fact that, if each of us had really exteriorized the *reality of his intentions and of his talents* (which appeared in so many "unexpected" causes for separation), the SI would have said and done one hundred times more stupidities and perhaps would have realised nothing good.

Since you haven't specified anyone for a future discussion about re-joining -- one wonders if you are thinking about the subtle politician Mustapha [Khayati]? or the loyal [Claudio] Pavan? about the democratic [Robert] Chasse? about the revolutionary [Jean] Garnault? -- I'll just say that, in general, two big categories of conduct -- by being mixed up with the grandiose assertion of a sort of total goal on which the SI would already magically fix itself -- have explained all the particular shortcomings that can manifest themselves in any one person: 1). the real inability to reason, live, etc (this category is the less



numerous); 2). some real but incoherent capabilities that hide, and in fact destroy themselves, behind the caricatural mask of a coherence desired, or even supposedly realized, by our "common" action. This person may be altogether admirable but he needs nothing short of the atmosphere of revolution for his talents to be revealed. In the absence of this atmosphere, we don't see anything. That person can write beautifully the best propositions, but the contrast with the triviality of the conduct of his daily life is only the more striking. False passions, which would make even slightly conscious adolescents smile, become the real theme of pompous reasonings. For some people, therefore, the SI becomes an abstract passion burdened with replacing real passions that have remained unknown to them. And as far as being a cold passion, the SI does exist in the abstract; *it doesn't do anything*; in any case it doesn't do anything by reconciliation with certain people who have certain real goals and certain comforting pretensions.

Since you say, quite rightly, that self-criticism is necessary (but it must be broader than those that you mention, above all must reach out to more comrades), I'll say that, for myself, I see at the moment only one to mention, but it is important: I have greatly underestimated the place and the usefulness of my personal activity in the SI by comparison to that of other comrades. I have too often, without realizing it and without anyone ever pointing it out (except Tony after Venice), responded to some objective problem (theoretical or even tactical) in the place of those who preferred to formulate no response. I use "answer" here in the broadest sense: response to what the outside world obliges us to choose and express at every moment. I believed in the autonomy and the essentially egalitarian participation of the other situationists (at least as a virtuality, when I was only beginning to know them) far more than reality suggested. I explain this by the fact that I am little accustomed to "keeping score" and am greatly deprived of the sense of hierarchy in interpersonal relations. Such tendencies that seem to me to be intended for a beautiful historical future in the coming forms of society, please me very much in everyone, myself included. The result of this was nonetheless a lack of clarity, which constitutes a serious error in organizational practice, entailing even no doubt an excessive simplification, and therefore an obscuring, of our theory of organization. Where [Raoul] Vaneigem formulated in writing some principles that were able to furnish a basis for an ideology of the SI, I certainly contributed, by one whole part of my practice, the appearance of verification of certain theses (trying meanwhile to limit their excessive interpretation on a theoretical level, by my intervention at the Conference of Paris and by my text of April 1968 on the organization of the SI). All I can add at this time about this subject is that since the overdue appearance of my awakening to the breadth of this problem -- in the spring of 1969 -- I have strived to act accordingly.

I will end with a question that is, unfortunately, related to this discussion. It was surprising to see you demand, and in such an inflexible tone, explanations about projects, explanations in which the French would justify to you the use of that portion of our recently acquired money that we did not distribute in Scandanavia, America and Holland. There was in your demand an intent to be blatantly unequal, since none of us ever thought to demand some account of the projects existing in those [three] countries. It is I, after our conversations with Tony in Amsterdam (where, furthermore, he did not mention the financial aspect of his projects of agitation in Holland), who suggested to the comrades having this money that they give him [Tony Verlaan] two million lire right away. No one discussed it for a minute, and in my view, money must always be distributed as soon as possible, without leaving the issue dormant out of respect for I-don't-know-what pompous formality. It goes without saying that if, for example, Jon had indicated to us that he felt he needed a million lire more in America, his "share" would have been augmented immediately, without his needing to furnish us with his reasons or with his bookkeeping records. It is really a shame that you have felt it necessary to act otherwise. This point is the only one, for several months now, that has aroused a unanimous and spontaneously felt accord in everybody here. On this matter our habits are good, and it's not that which must be changed. Without even bringing up the European source of this money, if the past implies a certain presupposition of possible future activity, what has been done thus far by the SI in France holds up honorably in comparison with its activity in America.

In any case, the strictly egalitarian division at which we have finally arrived leaves to you the resources that are your due, for any activity you freely choose, including a separation, should that appear necessary to you eventually (if you make a separation based on the idea of looking for a new accord with former members of the SI, I believe that you will not lack candidates, but neither will you lack troubles with them, nor new versions of exactly the same problems that we have settled).

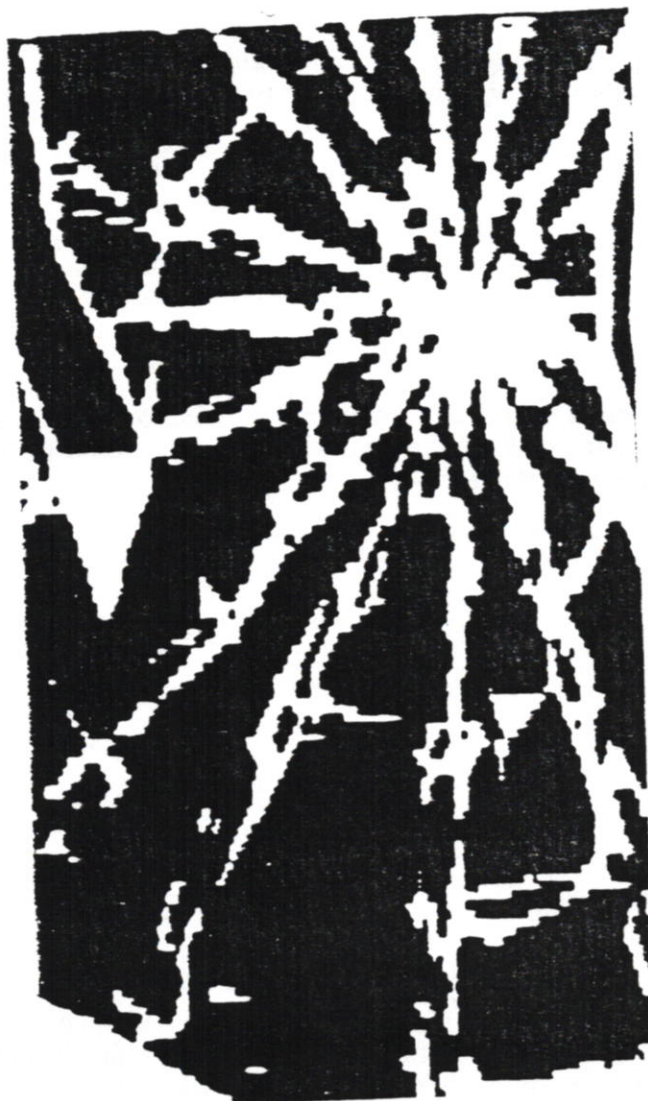


I hope that this discussion will be pursued, between tendencies or otherwise.

--Kind regards,

Guy

Can you send me 5 or 6 copies of the pirate edition of *Spectacle*? Even a bad English translation carefully handled could be useful to some European translator.





# Letters concerning a translation of situationist texts

**Unpublished; trans. from the Italian by Phil Edwards, 1998**

**From a registered letter from Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Editor**

[To] Signor R. R.

Paris 20e

France

[From] Milan, 18 November 1971

Dear Mr R.,

We would be interested in seeing the book cited below, with a view to an Italian translation. Please send us a reader's copy with an option for two months enclosed.

We await your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Cin Calabi

Foreign Rights Dept.

P.S. We received the book from Van Gennep today. We have asked them to write to us for the option. I would also be interested to know if you would be interested in a possible selection of texts from this volume. Best regards.

**From a registered letter:**

[To] Signor Calabi

Edizioni Feltrinelli

via Andegari, 6

20121 Milan - Italy

[From] Paris, 9th December 1971

Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 18th November, addressed to R. R., in which you asked for the option on an Italian translation of the collected edition of the SI journal published in its original French version by Van Gennep of Amsterdam, has just been passed to me.

As it happens, the Feltrinelli house has already published of their own accord, in December 1967 -- that is, at the time when the schools and universities of Turin and Milan were seeing



the beginnings of a rebellion which later, happily, spread widely among the workers of Italy -- the translation of a situationist pamphlet, entitled in your edition "*Della miseria nell'ambiente studentesco*" [On the Poverty of Student Life]. The edition of several thousand copies was sold out in ten days and, an unusual event in the history of the publisher, there was no second edition, despite the hundreds of requests for copies from various Italian revolutionary groups, and despite the promises made by your publishing house on this point. This was the result of a censorship exerted over [the person of] Feltrinelli by his current intellectual gurus ["maitres a penser"]. Feltrinelli, Stalinist reptile, may have turned Trotskyist, but in doing so he clearly did not leave behind his role of junior policeman to the bureaucracy.

We are staggered by the impudence of your current request. Your attempts at an overdue intellectual modernization won't [win back] anybody's good opinion. We formally deny you the right to publish, in whole or in part, any SI text.

We await your expropriation. Please make your boss aware of my contempt.

For the SI.: Guy Debord

# From another letter.

[To] M. Guy Debord

Internationale Situationniste

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Paris, France

[From] Milan, 31 December 1971

Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 9th December is overflowing with errors of fact and of argument -- over and above the stupidly arrogant tone in which it is written. I am amazed that the SI, having trumpeted for years the immorality of copyright, is now -- courtesy of yourself -- returning down the road trodden by "bourgeois" authors and publishers. What the hell does "tous les textes publies dans *Internationale Situationniste* peuvent etre librement reproduits, traduits ou adaptes, meme sans indication d'origine" ["all the texts published in *Internationale Situationniste* may be reproduced, translated or adapted, without indication of the origin"] mean now? Is it just put on to make you look "more revolutionary than thou"? Or, as everything leads me to believe, is it you who are claiming -- against the will of the group -- rights you don't have?

In any case, the question doesn't interest me very much. Rather, I'd like to establish a few points of fact, without for all that kidding myself that I'll be able to convince a person like you -- whose hysterical *cialtrona* letter shows to be constitutionally averse to finding out truth of any sort. Let me tell you then that the "several thousand copies" of "*Della miseria nell'ambiente studentesco*" which were printed were sold at the same rate as other publications in the same series, and were in part distributed free, just as we do with other books of the sort, which we look to not for material profit but to provide cultural and political information and updates. As is the rule, given the non-profitable nature of the series, the titles were not reprinted; the print run was only exhausted, in any case, because the copies remaining were given away to cultural and political groups.

Thus your observations about the "unusual event in the history of the publisher" are nothing but gossip.



As for the supposed censorship "exerted over Feltrinelli by his current intellectual gurus," I invite you to read the publisher's catalogue: if nothing else, you'll find out what it means to have intellectual courage and independence.

Feltrinelli, whatever you think, has never been a Stalinist, and he is a long way from being a Trotskyist. What are you?

From the text of your letter, I'd say you are ill. We are therefore not concerned, M. Debord, with your good opinion; we are content with that of our readers, who represent today the best of Italian militant culture and political action.

Good advice: get help.

Good wishes: get well soon.

[Signed] Gian Piero Brega

**From the SI to G. P. Brega, with a copy to Del Bo, director of the archives of the Feltrinelli Institute:**

[To] Milan, 14 February 1972

Little prick,

We have read your letter to Debord.

We are happy to note that you are irritated.

We note also how much you are [puffed up] by the limited and risible increase in power which the otherwise limited and ridiculous "exile" of your boss allows you in your publishing house.

As an agent of Feltrinelli can only be a liar, your embarrassed pseudo-corrections on the topic of "Misere en milieu etudiant" don't deserve any reply (but not a few extremists can still remember your worthy ally, Nanni Balestrini, who is now talking a blue streak about "wanting everything," but who at the start of 1968 contented himself with conducting a wretched but insistent [debt collection] for your firm, in search of the proceeds from the "underground" sales of this very pamphlet of ours).

You confirmed, moreover, the barefaced uselessness of your lies when you claimed that your boss is not and has never been a Stalinist. You turd, you'd obviously like to be in the position of Stalin himself so as to be able to lay down the canonical definition of the word. According to you, Feltrinelli would not be a Stalinist; what's more, neither Dubcek, nor Kadar, nor Arthur London [Jack London?], nor Castro, nor Mao would be. On this basis not even you, Brega, would be a *baldracca* or even an imbecile! We understand your interest in this way of thinking, but enough dreaming!

If you weren't so ignorant, as is required for Feltrinelli's editorial directors, you'd know that the documents which prove the Stalinism of Feltrinelli and some of his dealings with the party called "Communist" are already collected in the Feltrinelli Institute itself; you have only to ask Del Bo to show them to you. But I am sure these will not suffice to convince you, even if Feltrinelli was paying you thousands of times less *minchioni* to tell young revolutionaries about your artificial anti-stalinist virginity.

When do you intend to get Feltrinelli to pay you enough to justify writing that Giangiacomo is not your boss but "is a revolutionary"? Try going to explain this to the workers in his paper



mills and other factories.

You're mistaken, you louse, if you're kidding yourself that it would be easier for you or for Feltrinelli to fool us than his workers! And you're mistaken if you think Feltrinelli's workers are all like you.

You speak of "illness," Brega; already you think you're practicing psychiatry in Moscow! But you are much, much more vulnerable than that. And you're certainly not out of our reach. You talk against copyright and bourgeois usages - you, you policeman! But it was your publishing house which played, as usual, that bourgeois juridical game, asking for translation rights. And, as we have said, we refuse them to you, because of everything that you are.

If our contempt means nothing to you, *bella figa*, there was no need to ask us for anything.

Revolutionaries, for their part, have always been able to reproduce whatever they wanted from the SI's texts; and we have never opposed, in any way, the many pirate editions, put out in ten countries, of our texts and our books.

But the Feltrinelli company does not even deserve a pirate edition. In any case, even if you ignored our refusal, you can be sure that we would not protest by any juridical and bourgeois route.

It's you, Gian Piero Brega, since you have exported your bragging with this letter, who we shall consider as personally responsible for any edition of our texts put out by the Feltrinelli company.

And it's out of your hide, this time, that we'll have the pleasure of taking our payment.

For the Italian section of the SI

Gianfranco Sanguinetti



